

## The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England

# Intersections

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN EARLY MODERN CULTURE

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# The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England

*Edited by*

Annette Kern-Stähler  
Beatrix Busse  
Wietse de Boer



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Cover illustration: The late ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Fuller Brooch, showing the earliest known personification of the Five Senses. Hammered silver and niello, diameter: 11.4 cm. London, British Museum. Image © Trustees of the British Museum.

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# Acknowledgments

Most of the contributions to this volume began their life as papers presented at an international conference on the five senses in medieval and early modern cultures, which we organized in June 2014 at the University of Bern. We would like to thank the Swiss National Science Foundation, the Burgergemeinde Bern and the Universities of Bern and Heidelberg for their generous financial support that made this conference possible.

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Bern, Heidelberg and Oxford, Ohio

Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse and Wietse de Boer

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Wycliffe College, Toronto, finished his PhD in 2013 under the direction of Joseph Goering. His dissertation explored John Wyclif's *Sermones* in comparison with the preaching of several of his contemporaries in order to demonstrate both the controversial and the conventional in Wyclif's preaching programme. His current research is a book length study of Wyclif's anti-mendicant preaching, looking especially at how he appropriated mendicant preaching materials, most notably William Peraldus' *Summa de vitiis*, into his own polemical agenda.

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the works of Chaucer and Langland. With Professors Annette Kern-Stähler and Fiona Macpherson (philosophy, University of Glasgow) she is currently running an international interdisciplinary project funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh on the history of the senses.

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PhD (2015), University of Bern, is a post-doctoral researcher and teaching assistant for Medieval English Studies at that university. Her doctoral thesis, entitled “Remember Little Isaac: Women and Children in John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*”, explores the role and function of child martyrs in Foxe’s sixteenth-century martyrology, shedding light on hitherto understudied aspects of this seminal work. She has also published an article on Foxe’s book, entitled “Writing the Relic, Fetishising the Written: John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*” (*Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 2010). Other research interests include Anglo-Saxon literature, medieval travel literature, hagiography and animals in medieval and early modern culture.

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# Introduction

Annette Kern-Stähler and Kathrin Scheuchzer

The Fuller Brooch, which is reproduced on the cover of this volume, is the earliest known representation of the five senses in art. The Anglo-Saxon silver disc brooch, held in the British Museum, dates from the ninth century and may have been crafted in the court workshop of King Alfred the Great. The central part of the brooch is decorated with five figures, who personify the five senses. The largest one is sight, prominently placed in the centre of the brooch, glaring at us with wide eyes. Around sight are four figures which can be identified by their gestures: hearing raises one hand to his ear, smell sniffs at a leaf, taste places his hand in his mouth, touch rubs his hands together. The five senses are surrounded by roundels depicting the material world of humans, animals, birds and plants. David Pratt has recently argued that the central figure of sight represents the mind's eyes (*modes eagan*), the conduits through which wisdom is obtained, which feature prominently in Alfred's writings. The mind's eyes are supported by the four outer senses which apprehend the material world.<sup>1</sup>

The Fuller Brooch helps us understand how King Alfred and his court circle made sense of the world around them and how they understood the role of the senses in the acquisition of learning and wisdom. As such it is an invaluable part of what Holly Dugan calls the 'historical archive of sensation',<sup>2</sup> an archive which has received increasing interest among a growing number of scholars who attempt to discover the full range of meanings that people in the past attributed to the senses.<sup>3</sup>

In what the anthropologist David Howes has called a 'sensorial revolution' in the humanities,<sup>4</sup> the study of the senses has in the past three decades emerged as a dynamic field of investigation. The focus on the senses has in particular been at the forefront of the historical disciplines in their attempt to gain a

- 1 Pratt D., "Persuasion and Invention at the Court of King Alfred the Great", in Cubitt C. (ed.), *Court Cultures in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference* (Turnhout: 2003) 189–222, 214–216. The iconography of sight connects the Fuller Brooch to the Alfred Jewel. See Webster L., "The Art of Alfred and His Times", in Guenther Discenza N. – Szarmach P.E. (eds.), *A Companion to Alfred the Great* (Leiden: 2015) 47–81, 65–66.
- 2 Dugan H., *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: 2011) 5.
- 3 See the introduction to Smith M., *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: 2008).
- 4 Howes D., "Charting the Sensorial Revolution", *Senses & Society* 1 (2006) 113–128.

better understanding of how people in the past understood and engaged with the world. Based on the premise that sense perception is not merely a matter of neurological processes but that the ways we use our senses are informed by social values and shaped by culture, sensory historians explore the shifting meanings of the senses and changes in the historical representations of sensory perception.<sup>5</sup> The present volume contributes to what Richard Newhauser terms 'sensorial research', which is not only concerned with the history of the senses and changing attitudes towards them but also investigates the 'interplay between the sensorium and conceptual categories in their social and cultural embeddedness'.<sup>6</sup> In the fields of medieval and early modern studies, sensorial research has seen a tremendous rise. In his introduction to the medieval volume of the *Cultural History of the Senses*, Newhauser refers to the 'sensory turn' as one of 'the most important ongoing projects of medieval studies in the twenty-first century'.<sup>7</sup>

This book includes medieval and early modern scholarship on the senses and thus brings to the fore changes and (more frequently) continuities across the medieval and early modern 'divide'. By focusing specifically on English literature, language and culture across different historical periods, the essays collected in this volume provide a diachronic investigation of the functions and development of sense perception in a given spatial context. They uncover and spotlight breaks and continuities in the understanding of and engagement with the five senses of medieval and early modern English writers. The contributors re-examine a range of well-known texts belonging to diverse genres, such as the Old English *Boethius* and *Marvels of the East*, Wyclif's sermons,

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- 5 Smith M., "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History", *Journal of Social History* 40 (2007) 841–858, esp. 842–844 and his *Sensing the Past*. See further Classen C., *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London – New York: 1993); Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2005); Jütte R., *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace* (Cambridge – Malden: 2005); Ong W.J., "The Shifting Sensorium", in Howes D. (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: 1991) 25–30, 26. For the field of history, David Howes names Johan Huizinga's *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1919) and Lucien Febvre's *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (1942) as two important precursors to the sensory turn. Howes D., "The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies", August 2013. <http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/the-expanding-field-of-sensory-studies/> [Accessed 12 June 2015].
  - 6 Newhauser R., "Foreword: The Senses in Medieval and Renaissance Intellectual History", *Senses & Society* 5 (2010) 5f.
  - 7 Newhauser R., "Introduction: The Sensual Middle Ages", in Newhauser R. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages* (Bloomsbury: 2014) 1–22, 2.



medieval medical texts, Chaucer's narrative poems, the York Plays, Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Margaret Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. The focus is on the authors' deployment of sense perception, sensory experience and their use of sensory metaphors as a way of addressing and articulating the social, cultural, political and religious issues of their time. Another emphasis of this volume is on reading and theatre as multi-sensory experiences, an emphasis which reflects the increasing scholarly interest in recapturing and reconstructing past sensescapes.<sup>8</sup> Where it investigates the relation between sensory imagery and the underlying ideological concepts, this volume is not only in conversation with sensory studies in general and sensory history in particular but also contributes to related fields, such as disability studies, the history of religion, historical linguistics and the study of early modern science.

Throughout the period under investigation in this volume, classifications of the five senses were largely based on Platonic and Aristotelian theories of sense perception.<sup>9</sup> Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus* as well as Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* formed the basis for later discussions of the sensorium and provided a hierarchy of the senses that remained influential, though not undisputed, until well into the early modern period. Primacy was almost universally given to *visus* (sight), followed by *auditus* (hearing), *odoratus* (smell), *gustus* (taste) and *tactus* (touch).<sup>10</sup> This hierarchy of the senses was connected by writers like Augustine and Alexander Neckham to the four elements in a way that reinforced and substantiated the primacy of seeing and the inferiority of touch.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, medieval and early modern writers traditionally took up the Aristotelian model and presented sight as the highest of senses,

8 On this trend and its pitfalls see Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense".

9 Aristotle's view that there were five, and only five, senses (*De anima*, book III, chapter 1), has been disputed throughout history and is still a matter of debate. See Macpherson F., "Taxonomising the Senses", *Philosophical Studies* 153 (2011) 123–142. Macpherson herself rejects the 'sparse view', which holds that there are only a small number of distinct senses, and argues for a 'fine-grained taxonomy of the senses' (141).

10 For a detailed discussion of the cultural construction of this hierarchy, see Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 61ff.

11 See Gillespie V., "The Senses in Literature: The Textures of Perception", in Newhauser R. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages* (London – New York: 2014) 153–173, 166–167; Vance E., "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye", in Nichols S.N. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames* (Baltimore: 2008) 13–29, 16f.; Vinge L., *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (Lund: 1975).

attributing predominantly negative moral connotations to the lower senses of taste and touch. Sense perception thus became carefully prescribed in that the lower senses were readily associated with bodily and carnal experiences and needed to be kept in check. The higher senses of vision and hearing, on the other hand, were often connected with spirituality and enlightenment. Following Augustine's alignment of sight with light, the study of optics in the Middle Ages often associated vision with the perception of the light of God and it followed that bad eyesight presented a significant disadvantage in the engagement of believers with the divine.<sup>12</sup> Defective vision, therefore, needed to be medically treated, but not without the invocation of God's grace. As Edward Wheatley phrases it, 'the religious model of disability inform[ed] the medical one'.<sup>13</sup>

Disability studies scholars have long recognised the importance of investigating the ways in which physical impairments are socially and culturally constructed as disabilities.<sup>14</sup> As Edward Wheatley and Irina Metzler have emphasised, the distinction between physical impairment on the one hand and its social and cultural construction as disability on the other is all the more necessary when studying past cultures.<sup>15</sup> After all, while a physical condition (impairment) may remain unchanged from one culture to another, its perception is historically and culturally contingent, so that 'one cannot [...] speak automatically of all impaired persons as disabled at all times, in all places'.<sup>16</sup> The senses were perceived as the windows to the soul and it followed that

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12 Wheatley E. *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: 2010) 187–188.

13 Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 192.

14 See for example Davis L.J., "Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies", *American Literary History* 11 (1999) 500–512; Barnes C. – Mercer G. – Shakespeare T., *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction* (Leeds: 1996); Garland-Thomson R. "Disability and Representation", *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 120, 2 (2005) 522–527.

15 Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 5–6; Metzler I., *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (London – New York: 2006) 2f. The distinction between impairment and disability has recently been challenged by a number of scholars who argue that the focus on the social construction of disability belittles the physical condition of the impaired. They suggest that the term 'disability' should be used for both the bodily condition and the effects of social disablement: disability, they argue, is seen as 'something that is constructed by both bodily difference and social perception at the same time'. Eyler J.R. (ed.), *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (Farnham: 2010) 8.

16 Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 9.

bodies with impaired sensory capacities contained impaired souls. The five senses, perceived as conduits of base human desires, were readily associated with the seven deadly sins,<sup>17</sup> and sensory othering and stereotyping in medieval literature and culture often circled around notions of sensual indulgence and excess and were thus also connected to notions of sin.<sup>18</sup> This relation between sensing and sinning allowed for a series of sensory metaphors intimately connected to questions of religiosity and piety.

In accordance with the Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses, in which sight is perceived as the highest of senses, blindness became a central concern for medieval and early modern writers and was often interpreted and construed as a physical sign of moral and spiritual corruption. Five essays in this volume are concerned with vision and defective vision. **Katherine Hindley** explores the Old English versions of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* and Augustine's *Soliloquia*, which were probably produced by the same translator at the court of King Alfred the Great or even by King Alfred himself. With their abundant references to vision, these translations display a focus on sight which we already noted in the case of the Fuller Brooch, associated with the same court. Significantly, the Old English verbs *behealdan*, *locian*, *sceawian* and *beseon* were used not only to refer to physical sight but also, metaphorically, to mental sight, to wisdom and understanding.<sup>19</sup> It is this semantic overlap between physical and mental vision which Hindley is interested in. She shows how the translator of Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* and Augustine's *Soliloquia* adapts his Latin sources to foreground the analogy between sight and understanding.

The results of Hindley's study are particularly interesting in the context of recent research in cognitive linguistics, which has revealed that the vocabulary of physical perception is mapped onto the vocabulary of knowledge and feeling. Drawing on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on conceptual metaphor and embodiment,<sup>20</sup> Eve Sweetser has shown that the conceptual metaphor 'understanding-is-seeing' forms part of a systematic cross-linguistic

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17 See Newhauser, "Foreword: The Senses" 7.

18 Metzler has shown that the attitude towards impairment in the Middle Ages was much more complex and that the connection between sin and physical disability was 'not as straightforward as the secondary literature has tended to assume'. Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 8 and see further *ibid.* 38–64.

19 Kay C.J., "Metaphors We Lived By", in Roberts J. – Nelson J. (eds.), *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy* (London: 2000) 283.

20 Lakoff G. – Johnson M., *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago – London: 1980); Lakoff G. – Johnson M., *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: 1999) 16–44.

mapping between cognitive states and physical perception, in which the more abstract domain of experience (the mind) is conceptualised in terms of a more concrete domain of experience (the body).<sup>21</sup> As **Javier Enrique Díaz-Vera** reminds us in his chapter on the Old English vocabulary of vision and touch, the large-scale conceptual metaphor 'mind-as-body' is subject to cultural variation and change through history.<sup>22</sup> His study of Old English verbs of visual and tactile perception demonstrates that the cross-linguistic mapping of 'understanding-is-seeing', which was prevalent in the texts discussed by Hindley, is only one of many Old English vision metaphors. Vision in Old English, Díaz-Vera's study demonstrates, is mapped onto a variety of verbs, many of which are not connected with cognition (e.g. 'feeling an emotion-is-seeing'; 'restraining-is-seeing'; 'protecting-is-seeing'). At the same time, in Old English, not only seeing but also other perception verbs are mapped onto understanding, such as the conceptual mapping 'understanding-is-touching'. Díaz Vera explores the paths of semantic change through which the Old English vocabulary of vision and touch perception was created and its metaphorical uses in Anglo-Saxon texts.

In accordance with the conceptual metaphor 'understanding-is-seeing', a lack of understanding and a refusal to see the truth was expressed metaphorically in terms of visual error and blindness. As Wheatley has shown, this is particularly poignant in 'the use of blindness as an epithet applied to Jews for refusing to "see" the divinity of Jesus'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the protagonists of many medieval accounts of healing miracles, which present blindness (and other afflictions) as a punishment for transgressive behaviour, are cured once they understand ('see') their erratic ways and thus regain vision both literally and metaphorically.<sup>24</sup> These healing miracles portray both blindness and its cure as sudden transformations. Yet, as **Beatrix Busse and Annette Kern-Stähler**

21 Sweetser E., *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: 1990). Of particular interest to historical studies of cross-linguistic mappings will be the forthcoming publication of the results of the "Mapping Metaphor with the *Historical Thesaurus*" project at the University of Glasgow, which explored changes in metaphorical thought and expression in the history of English: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/fundedresearchprojects/metaphor/> [Accessed 17 June 2014].

22 See also Caballero R. – Ibarretxe-Antuñano I., "Ways of Perceiving and Thinking: Re-Vindicating Culture in Conceptual Metaphor Research", *Cultural Semiotics* 7 (2009) 268–290.

23 Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 19.

24 Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 146–149; Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 151–172.

argue, sightedness and blindness were not universally regarded as absolute categories in this period. Drawing on a corpus of selected medical texts, they retrieve a set of linguistic expressions which were used in Middle English to describe visual impairments and study their dissemination among less specialised audiences. Their analysis shows that there was in the late medieval period an awareness of various degrees of visual impairment, covering a wide spectrum between total blindness and perfect vision, and that linguistic constructions of partial sight had by the fourteenth century become part of the linguistic repertoire. Busse and Kern-Stähler draw particular attention to the fact that these intermediate stages are not (yet) expressed by specific technical terms, but rather by a range of lexico-grammatical strategies. They argue that many of these strategies suggest that in the late medieval period visual impairments were linguistically construed as disabilities and emphasise that it is crucial to include the field of historical linguistics in studies which set out to shed light on the change in meaning assigned to impairments, i.e. in studies on the histories of disabilities.

Questions of impaired or distorted vision have also played a prominent part in philosophical discourses surrounding sensory experience, beginning with Plato's cave allegory in the *Republic*. Our (in)ability to differentiate between reality and illusion, the real world and the shadows thereof, has often been tied to visual sense perception. With the rise of optical instruments designed to improve vision in the seventeenth century came a renewed questioning of the reliability of the sensorium.<sup>25</sup> As **Virginia Richter** shows, the distortion of vision could also be interpreted as the result of scientific attempts to enhance it. This is how Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, reacted to the idea put forward by the newly founded Royal Society for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge (1660) that our senses are defective and in need of improvement. Early modernity saw great innovations in optical instruments, and Robert Hooke and his fellow members of the Royal Society advocated their use to supplement the sense of sight. What to Robert Hooke, who in his *Micrographia* (1665) praised the microscope as an instrument which helps us to discover a 'new visible World', was an improvement of sight, was to Cavendish an interference with, and a distortion of, the sense of sight. While for Hooke the senses are deceptive, for Cavendish it is the technical apparatuses designed to improve them that conduce to error. As Richter argues, instead of discovering new worlds by the microscope, Cavendish resorted to creative world-making by means of fiction.

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25 See Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 189f.

The enhancement and distortion of sight is also at the centre of **Tobias Gabel's** essay on John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton, who was almost completely blind by 1652, was fascinated by the development of new optical instruments like the telescope. However, Gabel is not so much interested in questions relating to the enhancement or distortion of vision by these apparatuses but rather in the (temporary) improvement of human vision by God's grace as promised by God to mankind (Book III) and in the distortion of spiritual vision as a result of the Fall of the Angels. Gabel looks at three types of vision in *Paradise Lost*: divine vision, angelic vision and (postlapsarian) human vision. He argues that the latter two types of vision are by no means fixed: the blind speaker receives temporary divine vision; the fallen angels lose their spiritual vision.

With **Dieter Bitterli's** contribution, we move from divine, angelic and human sight to monstrous sight and from the enhancement of vision by God's grace or by the use of optical instruments to visual and other sensory acuieties in the monstrous races. Bitterli explores the text and images of the earliest known version of the Old English prose treatise *The Marvels of the East*, which survives in the *Beowulf* manuscript. It is this version of the *Marvels* in particular, he argues, which defines the creatures of the east as 'other' through their oversized sensory organs and the heightened sensory qualities associated with them. Yet, while the unfamiliar sensory qualities of the creatures from the east serve as codes of alterity, creating distance between the exotic world of the *Marvels* and its readers, at the same time the text and its images encourage their readers/beholders to engage their own senses in order to apprehend the strange world presented to them.

Can the senses be trusted? While the interest of Robert Hooke and other advocates of the New Science in this question was driven by empirical enquiry, medieval writers discussed this question within the framework of the moral evaluation, or ethics, of the senses. As Constance Classen and David Howes put it: 'Equally significant to the ways the senses are practiced are the ways in which a society decides that they should *not* be used: when and what we must *not* see, or touch, or taste'.<sup>26</sup> Women in particular were advised to shield their senses. A large number of late medieval and early modern texts was informed by, and promulgated, the Aristotelian notion that women were weak by nature.<sup>27</sup> According to medieval commentaries on Aristotle, women

26 Howes D. – Classen C., "Introduction: Ways and Meanings", *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (Abingdon: 2014) 1–13, 5.

27 Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* 728a21, 765b16–17, 775a14. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. C. Barnes, trans. A. Peck, the revised Oxford Translation (Princeton: 1984) 2 vols, vol. 1, 1111–1218.

were inclined to succumb to temptation, and homiletic and conduct literature taught them 'precautions' against their 'natural instincts' and warned them about the moral dangers of the senses.<sup>28</sup> The *Book of the Knight of la Tour-Landry*, for example, which was printed in English translation by William Caxton in 1484, admonished them to be 'ferme' to the world.<sup>29</sup> The author draws on Eve as a negative exemplum who sinned through looking at, touching and eating the forbidden fruit.<sup>30</sup> Eve's use of the senses was often juxtaposed to that of Mary, who in the medieval imagination stayed indoors when Joseph was away and used her senses wisely.<sup>31</sup>

As much as sense impressions could be conducive to devotion, they could be morally dangerous. Likening sense impressions to 'pure and impure embraces', Augustine divided them into licit and illicit pleasures.<sup>32</sup> Newhauser has pointed out that because the sense organs were not seen as passive receptors but as active agents in the process of perception, the senses were 'a vital element in the formation of the individual's moral identity'.<sup>33</sup> Increasingly after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), medieval pastoral theology was driven by the need to educate and control the senses and created a 'Christian ethics of the senses'.<sup>34</sup> The fourteenth-century pastoral manual *Instruction for Parish Priests* by John Mirk, for example, asks the priest to probe the confessant in order to find out if any of the five senses has 'tysed þe to sinne' (enticed you to sin).<sup>35</sup>

As Sean Otto argues, the sermons by the fourteenth-century preacher John Wyclif are steeped in the tradition of medieval pastoral literature, which warned of the moral dangers of the senses. Otto shows that Wyclif's sermons

28 See Kern-Stähler A., *A Room of One's Own: Reale und mentale Innenräume weiblicher Selbstbestimmung im spätmittelalterlichen England* (Frankfurt et al.: 2002) 35–41.

29 *The Book of the Knight of la Tour-Landry*, ed. H.C. Wright (London: 1906; reprint, New York: 1969) 15–18.

30 *Ibid.*, 55–58.

31 For example in a sermon by the fifteenth-century English preacher William Lichfield. Owst G.R., *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford: 1961) 387.

32 Palazzo E., "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages", *Viator* 41 (2010) 25–56, 29.

33 Newhauser, "Introduction: The Sensual Middle Ages" 22.

34 Caseau B., "The Senses in Religion: Liturgy, Devotion, and Deprivation", in Newhauser R. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses* 89–110, 108. See also Casagrande C. "Sistema dei sensi e classificazione dei peccati (secoli xii–xiii)", *Micrologus* 10 (2002) 33–53; Casagrande C. – Vecchio S., *I sette vizi capitali: Storia dei peccati nel Medioevo* (Torino: 2000); Newhauser, "Foreword: The Senses".

35 John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. W. Peacock, 2nd rev. ed., EETS o.s. 31 (London: 1868; reprint, London: 1902) 41.



on the five senses expose his traditional views of the need to control the senses in order to avoid temptations that lead to sin and thus supports recent research which sees Wyclif more as a medieval theologian than a proto-Reformer.

**Richard Newhauser** shows that Chaucer participated in the tradition of the moral education of the senses. In the “Parson’s Tale”, hell is constructed as a place in which the sinner is punished by a violent assault on all the senses, a multisensual punishment which intensifies the torment meted out there. By contrast, the ideal garden in *The Parliament of Fowls*, a ‘heaven on earth’, offers multisensorial pleasures. Chaucer, Newhauser argues, relies on the multisensual in conveying the intensity of sensation which can be found in his constructions of places outside human experience, the realms of heaven and hell.

According to **Jens Martin Gurr’s** reading of *Paradise Lost*, it is the inability to control our senses which Milton holds responsible for the failure of the English Revolution. Gurr, who reads Milton’s *Paradise Lost* politically as a coded account of the failure of the English Revolution, argues that Milton expresses his views on the inability of ‘the people’ to subject their senses to the control of reason and to handle freedom in the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve and their inability to control their senses.

In the medieval period, the insistence on controlling the senses stands in stark contrast to the richness of sensory experience offered in the Church. As Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler have pointed out, ‘[a]t the intersections between [the secular and the sacred] stood the five senses – the portals of the soul, the links between the inner and the outer worlds’.<sup>36</sup> In this context, the senses function as an ‘interface’ through which the sacred can be experienced.<sup>37</sup> Among the best-known examples of this is Augustine’s description of his conversion to Christianity in terms of spiritual sense perception. His account in the *Confessions* focuses on the different ways in which God makes himself perceptible to man. Augustine’s experience of the divine is channelled through the five senses, allowing him to see, hear, smell, taste and touch God beyond the realm of earthly experience. In a similar vein, Thomas asks for a sensory experience of the risen Christ despite the latter’s insistence on belief as a non-sensual concept. Thomas requires physical proof of Christ’s resurrection and his faith is thus rooted in sense experience. The senses became a central concern in the medieval Church, not least because the Catholic Mass was centred on the Elevation of the consecrated Host and the importance of perceiving

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36 Boer W. de – Göttler C., “Introduction: The Sacred and the Senses in an Age of Reform”, in Boer W. de – Göttler C. (eds.), *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: 2013) 1–13, 3.

37 Boer – Göttler, “Introduction” 4.



it visually.<sup>38</sup> Eric Palazzo has recently emphasised the sensory dimension of medieval liturgy and the sensoriality of liturgical objects which was activated during ritual performance. The Church offered its faithful a rich sensual experience: touching relics, listening to the word of God and to heavenly music, looking at and tasting the body of Christ in the Eucharist and smelling frankincense were part of the multisensoriality of liturgy.<sup>39</sup> The sweet scent of saints and their relics and the bad odours associated with heresy and moral corruption additionally fostered the notion of sensual spirituality in Roman Catholicism.

As **Rory Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler**'s joint contribution to this volume shows, medieval productions of Corpus Christi plays readily drew on this centrality of the senses in the religious sphere and reinforced the idea of a sensory landscape connected to heaven, hell, the saints and the devil. Like liturgy, which had a profound influence on medieval drama, the production of these plays offered a pan-sensory appeal to its audiences. Focusing on the relatively understudied sense of smell, Critten and Kern-Stähler reconstruct the smell-scape of the York Corpus Christi Play. Analysing references to smell and their production in the York play-text alongside records of analogous drama and the visual arts, archaeological and historical records of medieval York and contemporaneous ideas about sense perception, they bring to the fore the play-texts' realisable potential to evoke the sense of smell or even to produce odour on stage. The multisensory experience of theatre also forms the centre of **Farah Karim-Cooper**'s chapter on the 'sensory body in Shakespeare's theatre'. Karim-Cooper argues that the experience of theatre-going in the early modern age was first and foremost a tactile one. She explores the sensory body's forms of contact with the playhouse and the ways in which dramatic performance and its reception are underpinned by the sense of touch.

It was the drama's appeal to the senses which increasingly became the subject of dispute. As Critten and Kern-Stähler point out, an awareness of the sensory appeal of dramatic performance underlies the criticism of the much-quoted author of the early fifteenth-century anti-theatrical tract, *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, who saw in the attendance of dramatic performance a misuse of the senses. These anxieties were augmented during the Reformation. As Matthew Milner reminds us, the reformers abhorred pre-Reformation worship as 'excessively sensual'.<sup>40</sup> Karim-Cooper argues that the moralistic diatribes

38 See Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven – London: 1992) 102ff.

39 See Palazzo, "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages"; Zumthor P., *La lettre et la voix: De la "littérature" médiévale* (Paris: 1987) 287–288.

40 Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham – Burlington: 2011) 3.

against the theatre articulate an analogous unease with 'sensory gluttony'. Like the Roman Catholic Mass, theatre was condemned in moralist discourse as offering a multisensory experience to its audience, with the sense of touch being the one most commonly evoked.

With the advent of the various Reformation movements, the sensescape was transformed in that the traditional objects of sense perception, such as the saints' relics and the transubstantiated Host, came under attack by the reformers and early Protestants. As several scholars have argued, the focus on seeing in the Roman Catholic Church was shifted to aurality as a consequence of the Protestants' return to the Word of God, expounded in the sermon, as the primary source of salvation.<sup>41</sup> As a result, reformers and Protestants have often been associated with austerity and frugality. Yet, Milner's study on the senses in the Reformation has shown that for sixteenth-century evangelicals, '[t]he senses were the means by which God made Himself known: without eyes and ears believers were literally [...] deaf and blind when it came to revelation'.<sup>42</sup> Spirituality was still a sensual experience in the centuries following the Reformation, then, but in an environment of continued doctrinal dispute the senses needed to be carefully controlled and proper sensing clearly demarcated from idolatry and heresy. As Peter Burke maintains, '[t]he debate on the primacy of different senses in different periods now seems rather sterile',<sup>43</sup> and recent scholarship has shown that there was more continuity than previously assumed.

Kathrin Scheuchzer confirms this by showing that John Foxe in his *Actes and Monuments* does not break with the idea that the senses bring the faithful into contact with the sacred; nor does his martyrology advocate, or show signs of, asensual frugality. On the contrary, it abounds with a rich sensory language and promotes the use of all five senses in the spiritual experience of the Word of God. It is thus not the use of sense perception as such which changes with the Reformation, Scheuchzer argues, but the object of sense perception: the Scriptures, not images and relics, emerge as something that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched.

Walter Ong argued long ago that the rise of the printing press in the Renaissance continued to foster the superiority of sight over hearing.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, this renewed focus on vision does not mean that the other senses lost

41 See Hunt A., *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: 2010).

42 Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* 192.

43 Burke P., *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: 2004) 111.

44 Ong W.J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London – New York: 1982) 121. See also Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 64ff.

their importance. On the contrary, Mark Smith argues that the elevation of *visus* in the 'print revolution' was far from universal.<sup>45</sup> As Howes points out, '[a]ny period of great cultural change will be a time of sensory *confusion*, for social revolutions are always sensory revolutions'.<sup>46</sup> Scholars have traced the development of the senses through the ages, from classical antiquity to modernity, and through a range of such social revolutions and paradigm shifts that have led to continued revaluation of the senses and their meanings. With the rise of anatomical illustration in the Renaissance, for example, sight became more explicitly linked to knowledge than it had been in previous centuries.<sup>47</sup> During the Age of Enlightenment, Constance Classen points out, the senses gradually lost their theological import and were increasingly subject to scientific and philosophical enquiry.<sup>48</sup> In our own day, scientists are rapidly making new discoveries about the nature of perception, which challenge some of the traditional views of the way we sense the world.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these rapidly changing attitudes towards the senses, not all underlying assumptions about, and concepts surrounding, sensation were revised, let alone supplanted. As Elizabeth Robertson concludes in her response to the chapters in this volume, both medieval and early modern writers shared the basic understanding that 'the senses extend the reach beyond the boundaries of the self'.<sup>50</sup> They were constructed and presented as conduits or channels through which the self experienced the outside world, was able to perceive the divine and could make sense of encounters with others. As such, the five senses presented a certain danger that needed to be kept at bay and at the same time offered intriguing ways of engaging with the material and spiritual world. Many of the underlying assumptions about sense perception, based on an Aristotelian understanding of the soul, held sway all through the Middle Ages, the centuries following the Reformation and beyond. Smith has shown, for instance, that olfactory othering,<sup>51</sup> which can be traced back to medieval associations of religious aberration with bad odours, was a central aspect of the Nazis' marginalisation and dehumanisation of Jews and also fostered

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45 Smith, *Sensing the Past* 2.

46 Howes, *Empire of the Senses* 11; emphasis added.

47 See Kemp M., "The Mark of Truth': Looking and Learning in Some Anatomical Illustrations from the Renaissance and Eighteenth Century", in Bynum W.F. – Porter R. (eds.), *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge: 1993) 85–121.

48 Classen, *Worlds of Sense* 4.

49 Macpherson F., "Introduction: Individuating the Senses", in Macpherson F. (ed.), *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: 2011) 3–43.

50 "From Gateways to Channels: Reaching towards an Understanding of the Transformative Plasticity of the Senses in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods" (in this volume).

51 See also Classen, *Worlds of Sense* 79ff. and Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 94f.

prejudices against African Americans in the United States.<sup>52</sup> Classen investigates what she terms ‘olfactory codes’ and their role in the process of othering, concluding that ‘the dominant group in a society ascribes to itself a pleasant or neutral smell within this system of olfactory classification.’<sup>53</sup> The senses, loaded with a range of long-standing connotations and meanings, thus pervade modern culture as much as they permeated medieval and early modern everyday life; from antiquity to the present they engage key questions of identity construction, religion, medicine and science.

What the future may hold we do not know, of course, but Hans Moravec from the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute in Pittsburgh predicted in 1997 that the ‘[s]enses, and the instincts using them, are increasingly liabilities’ and that ‘all our senses will become obsolete’ in a world in which our lives are played out in cyberspace rather than in what Moravec calls ‘a rough physical place.’<sup>54</sup> The world we live in, he argues, has become tame in comparison to the ‘wild’ times of the past. Nevertheless, ‘[h]umans need a sense of body’, he writes, and a computer playing chess ‘knows nothing about physical chess pieces or chessboards, or about the staring eyes of its opponent.’<sup>55</sup> Whether or not the senses have a future will, therefore, depend on the preservation of a sensory culture that takes its roots in classical antiquity and was cultivated throughout the Middle Ages and early modernity.

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- 52 Smith M.M., “Transcending, Othering, Detecting: Smell, Premodernity, Modernity”, *Postmedieval* 3, 4 (2012) 380–390, 383ff.
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  - 54 Moravec H., “The Senses Have No Future” (Pittsburgh: 1997) n.p. Available from: <https://www.frc.ri.cmu.edu/~hpm/project.archive/general.articles/1997/970128.nosense.html> [Accessed 27.03.2015]. For another discussion of future directions in connection to cyberspace and virtual reality, see Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 345ff.
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## PART 1

### *Sensing and Understanding*





# Sight and Understanding: Visual Imagery as Metaphor in the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*

Katherine Hindley

In the Old English translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia*, several references to the senses in the Latin source have been expanded to include a list of the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. The Anglo-Saxon author takes care to specify the names of the senses, demonstrating an interest in the elements of sensory perception.<sup>1</sup> Imagery of sight, in particular, recurs throughout the Old English *Soliloquies* and the related Old English *Boethius*. Here, I use the *Soliloquies* and the prose version of the *Boethius* to explore how sight was understood as a bodily sense, how it was used metaphorically to discuss the workings of the mind, and how the Anglo-Saxon author's use of sight imagery changes according to the broader arguments that his texts are making. I begin by discussing the alterations made to the Latin sources, then examine how the scientific understanding of sight appears in the texts, and finally consider how the imagery of sight is influenced by the concept it is most frequently compared to – in these texts, the process of understanding.

Rosa Maria Fera has recently argued that sight is given priority over the other senses in Anglo-Saxon texts because of 'the relationship between sight, with its powerful cognitive potential, and the acquisition of knowledge'.<sup>2</sup> The Old English *Boethius*, which Fera discusses, and the Old English *Soliloquies*, which she does not, provide insight into the specific ways in which sight and knowledge were seen as parallel processes. The translator reshapes and alters both Latin sources, Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* and St Augustine's *Soliloquia*. As Kwame Anthony Appiah contends:

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- 1 Interest in the five senses was widespread in Anglo-Saxon England, as Dieter Bitterli demonstrates elsewhere in this volume. His examples of lists of the five senses in homilies and sermons, in particular, show that ideas about the importance of the senses reached a broad audience.
  - 2 Fera R.M., "Metaphors for the Five Senses in Old English Prose", *Review of English Studies* 63 (2012) 709–731, 730.

A literary translation [...] aims at producing a text whose relation both to the literary and to the linguistic conventions of the culture of the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object-text to its culture's conventions.<sup>3</sup>

When the translator uses sight as a metaphor and an analogue for mental processes he does not simply translate the Latin source but adapts it to fit his own ideas about understanding and sight, reflecting the Anglo-Saxon intellectual culture for which the translation was produced.

The Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies* provide a particularly interesting case for comparison because both texts appear to be by the same translator. They are two of a corpus of texts traditionally seen as having been written or commissioned by King Alfred the Great (r. 871–899). This authorship attribution and the relationship between these two texts and the rest of the group have been questioned by scholars such as Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, whose 2009 edition of the *Boethius* emphasises the differences between the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies* on the one hand, and the other supposedly Alfredian texts on the other.<sup>4</sup> However, there is little doubt about the relationship between the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*, and Godden and Irvine state that '[i]t is impossible to resist the conclusion that the two works are by the same author'.<sup>5</sup> Most scholars argue that the *Boethius* pre-dates the *Soliloquies*.<sup>6</sup> However, Leslie Lockett argues persuasively that 'at least some revision of the *Boethius* occurred after a period of serious engagement with the Latin *Soliloquia*', pointing to mutual influence between the two texts.<sup>7</sup> If both texts are by the same author and potentially influence each other, they provide the opportunity to analyse not only how the Anglo-Saxon author altered the Latin text to fit it to his cultural milieu, but also how he adapted his ideas about sight and understanding to fit the wider arguments of his sources.

3 Appiah K.A., "Thick Translation", *Callaloo* 16 (1993) 816.

4 *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. M. Godden – S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford: 2009) vol. 1, 135–139. See also Godden M., "Did King Alfred Write Anything?", *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007) 1–23.

5 *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 136.

6 For example, Hubbard F., "The Relation of the 'Blooms of King Alfred' to the Anglo-Saxon Translation of Boethius", *Modern Language Notes* 9 (1894) 161–171; Whitelock D., "The Prose of Alfred's Reign", in Stanley E.G. (ed.), *Continuations and Beginnings* (London: 1966) 67–103; Wilcox M., "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors: *Eagan Modes* and *Scip Modes*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006) 179–217.

7 Lockett L., *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 2011); Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* 325.

The idea that vision was an appropriate analogy for the mind, and the use of sight imagery to investigate epistemology, were by no means new in Anglo-Saxon England. Since antiquity:

[b]odily experience of visual perception [had] generated the prevailing cultural assumptions about mental cognition. Such assumptions became so pervasive that the semantic fields of vision and mental activity overlapped in ancient languages; indeed, much of this overlap survives in many modern languages.<sup>8</sup>

That this was the case for Old English is evident. The word *gleaw*, for example, can be used to describe both wisdom and clarity of vision, and there are many words which carry similar combinations of meanings.<sup>9</sup> As Christian J. Kay notes:

many words transfer from a meaning of physical vision to one of mental vision. These include *behealdan*, *locian*, *sceawian*, *beseon*, all with a literal meaning of *look at*, *gaze*, and a metaphorical one of *observe*, *regard*, *scrutinise*.<sup>10</sup>

Another example can be seen in the Old English *Boethius* itself in the word *andgit*, which is used to refer both to understanding and to the physical senses.<sup>11</sup>

It is apparent from the Anglo-Saxon author's treatment of his sources that he was aware of this semantic overlap between physical and mental vision, and of the potential for confusion that it creates. He took pains to clarify his translations by distinguishing between references to physical sight and references in which sight is used as a metaphor for understanding. As Miranda Wilcox points out, in translating the *Boethius* the author 'modified Boethius's

8 Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors" 180–181.

9 *The Dictionary of Old English*, online at <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/index.html> [accessed 29 April, 2014].

10 Kay C.J., "Metaphors We Lived By", in Roberts J. – Nelson J. (eds.), *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy* (London: 2000) 283.

11 For instance in the phrases 'swa ðeah sio gecynd eow tihð to þam andgite, ac eow teohð swiðe manigfeald gedwola of þam andgite' ('yet nature draws you to that understanding, but very manifold error draws you from that understanding') and 'hi ne mihton elles libbon gif hi nan grot andgites næfdon. Sume magon gesion, sume magon gehyron, sume gefredon, sume [gestincan]' ('they could not otherwise live if they did not have a speck of perception. Some can see, some hear, some feel, some smell'). *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 294 (ch. 26, lines 6–8) and 378 (ch. 41, lines 132–133).

ocular imagery by adding *eagan modes* eleven times in his prose and metrical versions of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in positions where sight is being used figuratively.<sup>12</sup> In the *Soliloquies*, as I will later discuss, there is even greater effort to make the analogy explicit. The author not only makes clear the moments at which the analogy is being used, but also the exact points of comparison between vision and understanding.

The translator also adds his own images, in which sight is compared to understanding in places where there is no equivalent in the Latin. In the *Soliloquies*, for example, the gradual movement towards seeing with the mind's eye is compared to a man climbing a ladder up a cliff so that 'þonne mæg he locian egðer ge ofer þone warað ge ofer þa sæ, þe hym ðonne benioðan byð, ge æac ofer þæt land þe hym ær bufan wæs'.<sup>13</sup> Sight imagery, and in particular the difference between bodily and spiritual sight, is also important in the third book of the *Soliloquies*, which does not appear in Augustine's *Soliloquia*. It seems to be the work of the Anglo-Saxon translator, who draws heavily on Augustine's *De Videndo Deo* and *De Civitate Dei*, Gregory the Great's *Morals* and *Dialogues*, and Jerome's *Commentary on Luke*. Malcolm Godden's proposed reordering of the text, which compensates for the apparent dislocation of leaves in the source for the only surviving manuscript, further focuses the book's argument on sight and knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The Old English *Boethius* remains closer to its source material than the *Soliloquies*, but it too makes significant alterations to the presentation of sight. The Anglo-Saxon author removes some material dealing with perception and freely adapts other sections of the source to present an interpretation of the role of the senses that is quite different to that of the Latin. Throughout the *Boethius*, God's vision is used as a counterpoint to the limitations of human sight. God sees more fully than humans can, perceiving both external and

12 Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors" 194–195.

13 'then he can look both over the shore and over the sea, which is then beneath him, and also over the land that was above him before': *King Alfred's Version of St Augustine's "Soliloquies"*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli (Cambridge, MA: 1969) 78, lines 21–23. Modern English translations are my own. I am grateful to Anya Adair for discussing them with me.

14 Godden M., "Text and Eschatology in Book III of the Old English *Soliloquies*", *Anglia* 121 (2003) 177–209. In Godden's revised ordering, the book opens with the question of what happens to the intellect after death, then moves on to discuss what the dead may see and know, and then to a lengthy discussion of the sight of God. There is a much greater emphasis on the difference that the separation of body and soul will make to what the mind can see and understand.

internal things and thoughts as well as deeds.<sup>15</sup> God is also able to see men's actions before they are thought of or performed, in line with the theory of his foreknowledge and omniscience. The description of his foreknowledge is markedly different in the Old English and in the Latin. In *De consolazione philosophiae*, Boethius argues that because of God's simplicity of comprehension he sees all things and all times in a continuous present. This allows man to have free will without diminishing God's omniscience or omnipotence. The Old English version of the text rejects this section of the discussion and replaces it with an image that brings the process of God's sight closer to the human, comparing Him to the pilot of a ship who prepares for bad weather ahead.<sup>16</sup> This image necessarily relies on God looking forward both spatially and temporally, experiencing the present and anticipating the future as humans do. This could reduce God's omnipotence, as Godden and Irvine have noted, stating that 'Wisdom's suggestion that God knows in advance that specific events may happen and harm his creatures and would like to prevent them seems to challenge both the goodness and the omnipotence of God'.<sup>17</sup> However, I argue that the image could be interpreted in another way, as demonstrating God's conscious desire to give free will to mankind even if their actions are harmful. The use of an image in which God's sight is temporal means that God has time to choose whether or not to influence man's actions, placing more emphasis on man's free will.

Although the contrast between omniscient divine sight and limited human sight discussed above is disrupted by the use of the image of God as the pilot of a ship, the Anglo-Saxon author has nevertheless chosen to insert it into the text because it illustrates a point which is fundamental to his purpose: that man's free will does not affect the progress of God's intentions for the world,

15 See for example *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 374 (ch. 40, lines 119–120 and ch. 41, lines 7–8).

16 'Fela is þæra þinga þe God [ær wat] ær hit gewyrðe and wat eac þæt hit derað his gesceaftum gif hit gewyrð. Nat he hit no forþi ðe he wille þæt hit gewyrðe, ac forþe þe he wile forwyрман þæt hit gewyrðe, swa swa god scipstyra ongit micelne wind and hreo se ær ær hit worðe, and hæf fealdan þæt segl and eac hwilum lecggan þone mæst and lætan þa betinge, gif he ær þweores winde bætte; wærnað he hine wið þæt weder': 'There is many a thing which God knows before it happens and also knows that it will harm his creatures if it happens. He does not know it because he wishes it to happen, but because he would like to prevent it happening, as a good pilot perceives the great wind and rough sea before it happens and gives orders to fold the sail and also sometimes to take down the mast and leave off beating, if he previously has been beating against the wind; he protects himself against the weather.' *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 377 (ch. 41, lines 96–102).

17 *The Old English Boethius* vol. 2, 491.

and that mankind can, with the exercise of wisdom, use free will to act in line with God's essential plan. Recognising this fact must lead also to the recognition that the manner in which sight imagery is used may vary significantly depending on the point the author wishes to make. It is important to consider not only how the author uses these images, but also where he deviates from what can be considered standard.

In order to spot deviations in the way that sight imagery is used, it is necessary to understand how the author conceived of sight 'scientifically'. By knowing how sight was thought to work, the ways in which sight is used metaphorically – in particular to construct ideas about understanding – will be illuminated. This should also lead to a fuller understanding of the reasons behind the Anglo-Saxon author's alterations of his sources. In considering the theory of sight, it is noticeable that in both Old English texts the author has omitted the passages which in the originals give the clearest indication of how the process of sight is imagined. *De consolacione philosophiae*, for instance, states in a passage absent in the Old English *Boethius* that the eyes function *iactis radiis*.<sup>18</sup> This theory of extramission was dominant in the West until the 13th century, and is the same theory that Augustine advances in *De Trinitate*.<sup>19</sup> It has been argued that:

[t]he common premise of all ancient theories of vision was that there must be some form of contact between the object of vision and the visual organ, for only thus could an object stimulate or influence the visual power and be perceived.<sup>20</sup>

Although Augustine's views are less clearly stated in *Soliloquia* than in *De Trinitate*, he does seem to follow the idea of contact by some form of visual ray or ray from the object seen. In the assertion that 'in oculis videre quod dicitur, ex ipso sensu constat atque sensibili, quorum detracto quolibet videri nihil potest', the implication must be that the process of seeing takes place in the

18 'by means of the light-rays which they project': *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio* 98, lines 70–71.

19 Lindberg D.C. (ed.), *Science in the Middle Ages*, Chicago History of Science and Medicine (Chicago – London: 1978) 349; 'quia radios qui per eos emicant et quidquid cernimus tangunt': 'because the rays which shoot out from them [the bodily eyes] touch whatever we observe': Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ed. W.J. Mountain, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 50, 50a (Turnhout: 1968) 296, lines 9–10.

20 Lindberg, *Science in the Middle Ages* 339.



conjunction between the seer and the object of sight.<sup>21</sup> Although this explanation of sight has been removed from the Old English version, Reason does state in the *Soliloquies* that for sight to take place the eyes must both see what they look at (implying active vision as opposed to passive gazing), and have ‘þæt þæt he per geseon wolde’.<sup>22</sup> While neither Old English text is explicit on the matter, the suggestion that sight requires both an object of vision and active effort on the part of the seer does imply that the Anglo-Saxon author’s understanding of sight conforms to the theory as stated in the Latin texts. Furthermore, the idea of contact between seer and object appears to be present in the idea that sight can draw the two together, as evident in the statement that ‘ælces licuman æagan behofað þreora þinga on hym silfum to habbæne; f(e)orðe byt þæt hit secð and to hym geteon wolde’.<sup>23</sup> The implication of these quotations is, then, that the Anglo-Saxon conception of sight was similar to that presented in the Latin texts. It is also relevant to note that just as the semantic fields of sight and understanding overlap in Old English, so do those of sight and holding:

*behealdan* presumably follows an etymological path from holding in the hand to holding in the eye (that is seeing), to holding in the mind, that is understanding; *locian*, interestingly, has another meaning of *belong*, *pertain*, while expressions for remembering include *(ge)healdan*, and *habban/niman/lettan on gemynde*.<sup>24</sup>

It seems at least possible that the frequency of the intersection between ideas of sight and ideas of touch in Old English may have its basis in the idea that sight establishes physical contact between the person seeing and the things being seen.<sup>25</sup>

21 ‘in the case of the eyes what is called seeing comes into being through the power of sensing and what is capable of being sensed, and if either of these is missing nothing can be seen’: Augustine, “Soliloquia”, in *Soliloquiorum libri duo; De immortalitate animae; De quantitate animae*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 89, ed. W. Hörmann (Vienna: 1986) 22, lines 2–4.

22 ‘that which he would [like to] see there’: *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 65, l. 4. The spelling here is as printed in Carnicelli.

23 ‘the eyes of every human body need to have three things of their own; the fourth is what it seeks and wants to draw to it’: *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 65–66, lines 8–1.

24 Kay, “Metaphors We Lived By” 284.

25 This may also have implications for Dieter Bitterli’s argument, elsewhere in this volume, about the contrast between monsters which flee from sight and non-threatening races who seem to welcome sight and touch.

With this in mind, it is possible to determine what similarities are being suggested between sight and understanding. In the fundamental respect of connection the two are presented as analogous in the *Soliloquies*:

seo gesyð þe we god myd geseon scylon is angyt. þæt angyt byð betweena twam þincgum, betweena þam ðe þær ongyt and þam (ðe) þær ongytan byð, and byð on egþrum fæst swa swa lufu byð betweena þam lufiende and þam ðe he þær lufað.<sup>26</sup>

the vision that we shall see God with is understanding. That understanding is between two things: between that which understands, and that which is understood; and it is fixed to both things just as love is between the lover and the one he loves.

Understanding, like sight, is envisioned as taking place between the person wishing to understand and the object being understood. The idea of understanding emerging from connection is also present in the text in the repeated image of a ship, representing the mind, which is shown as being physically connected to the earth, representing God, by means of the anchor cable of reason.

The *Boethius* also describes understanding as an external process taking place in the connection between two bodies. However, in this text the author does not make this essential similarity with the process of vision concrete as he does in the *Soliloquies*, where knowledge is itself represented by a physical object, the anchor cable. Wisdom tells the Boethius figure, Mind, that he cares more about his opinions than those of other men because he looks with one eye towards heavenly things, while the other eye is fixed on earth.<sup>27</sup> Unlike in the metaphor of the ship from the *Soliloquies*, the connection which allows understanding is the invisible visual ray proposed by the extramission theory. It is the prevailing idea that sight provides a physical bond between the seer and the object seen that creates the sense that Mind's opinions are in some manner connected with the divine, allowing him a more profound and thus more worthwhile understanding.

A similar use of the idea of connection by visual ray occurs in the image of the cartwheel which is used to demonstrate how men are subject to fate. This image, introduced to the text by the Anglo-Saxon author, places God at the axle of a wheel. Men are placed on the spokes, each with one eye fixed on

26 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 67, lines 6–9.

27 See *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 355 (ch. 38, lines 188–193).

earth, the other on heaven – in terms of the metaphor, looking towards the rim of the wheel or towards God at the axle. The men who are placed on the hub of the wheel, nearest to the axle and where the movement is smoothest, are those who have directed their minds towards God, while those who direct their minds towards earthly things are placed at the rim of the wheel, where the movement is rough. Greater understanding of God's purpose places men nearer to the hub, where they are less influenced by earthly fate. Again, sight is used as a metaphor for understanding, but this time the image works on three separate levels: understanding, sight, and the physical level of the cartwheel. These levels are connected through the parallel movements they suggest from rim to hub, either along the physical spokes of the wheel, or along the beam of the eye, or towards and away from the understanding of God. This works because of the implicit underlying assumption that the processes of sight and understanding both involve connections – the eye which is fixed on God provides a connection which keeps the man subject to fate secure, just as the anchor cable in the ship image from the *Soliloquies* keeps its ship safe against the waves. However, as in the similar passage mentioned above, and in contrast to the passage from the *Soliloquies*, these layers of meaning are not made explicit and the reader is left to interpret the metaphor for him- or herself.

This difference in the level of explicitness with which the metaphors are phrased is typical of the two texts. The *Boethius* tends to use sight imagery metaphorically. Although the text differentiates between the physical eyes and the eyes of the mind, as I have stated above, it is left to the reader to draw out the points of similarity between sight and understanding. For example, Wisdom prays:

Forgif us þonne hale eagan ures modes þæt we hi þonne moton afæstnian  
on þe, and todrif ðone mist þe nu hangað beforan ures modes eagam  
and onliht þa eagan mid ðinum leohte; forþam ðu eart sio birhtu ðæs  
soðan leohtes, and þu eart sio sefte ræst soðfæstra, and ðu gedest þæt hi  
ðe gesioð.<sup>28</sup>

Grant us then healthy eyes of our mind that we may fasten them on  
you, and drive away the mist that now hangs before our mind's eyes and  
lighten the eyes with your light; for you are the brightness of the true  
light, and you are the soft rest of the just, and you grant that they see you.

28 *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 318 (ch. 33, lines 244–248).

While sight is clearly being used here as a metaphor for understanding, the precise parallels for the mind's eyes, the mist that prevents clear vision, and the light of God are not given to the reader.

By contrast, in the *Soliloquies* the author tends to give a direct explanation for the use of sight to describe mental processes in order to create explicit connections between elements of vision and elements of understanding. This can come in the form of a direct question about the interpretation of figurative language, as for instance in the exchange:

Da cwæð ic: hwæt is þæt ðæt þu hest modes eagan?  
Da cwæð heo: gesceadwisnesse, to-æacan oðrum creftum.<sup>29</sup>

Then I said: What is the thing that you call the mind's eyes?  
Then she said: Reason, in addition to other abilities.

Even in more complex examples in which multiple analogies are simultaneously at work, the author makes the conjunctions between sight and understanding explicit. This can be seen, for example, in the explanation:

Ac swa swa þeos gesewe sunne ures lichaman ægan onleoht, swa onliht se wisdom ures modes ægan, þæt ys, ure angyt; and swa swa þæs lichamen ægan halren beoð, swa hy mare gefoð þæs leohtes þære sunnan, swa hyt byð æac be þæs modes ægan, þæt is, andgit. Swa swa þæt halre byð, swa hyt mare geseon mæg þære æccan sunnan, þæt is, wysdom.<sup>30</sup>

But just as the visible sun gives sight to the eyes of our body, so wisdom gives sight to the eyes of our mind, that is, our understanding. And just as the eyes of our body are more whole when they take more of the sun's light, so it is also with the mind's eyes, that is, understanding. The more whole that is, the more it may see of the eternal sun, which is wisdom.

Significantly, these explanations are additions by the Anglo-Saxon translator. Taken alongside the clarifications made in the *Boethius* of the relationship between physical and metaphorical sight, the explicit paralleling of sight and understanding in the *Soliloquies* can be seen as part of a conscious attempt to draw out the elements of the metaphor.

29 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 62, lines 4–5.

30 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 78, lines 3–8.

The differences between the two texts, with the *Soliloquies* individually explaining each element of the metaphor, are also meaningful. As I have mentioned above, the *Boethius* is usually taken to be the earlier text. In this case, the different approach taken in the *Soliloquies* might represent a progression of the translator's attempt to convey the material to his audience. However, if we accept Leslie Lockett's persuasive argument that the texts influence each other, then the differences seem more likely to reveal the translator's sensitivity to the demands of each text.

In the Old English *Boethius* human sight is, as I have already shown, presented as strictly limited. It is only possible for sight to comprehend things that can be seen – in other words, external, physical things. As Wisdom tells Boethius:

Peah þu nu hwam fæger þince, ne bið hit no þy raðor swa, ac seo ungesceadwisnes heora eaganan hi amerrað þæt hi ne magon ongiton þæt hi þe sceawiað utan næs innan.<sup>31</sup>

though you might now seem fair to some people, it is nevertheless not so, but the irrationality of their eyes hinders them so that they cannot understand that they see you outwardly not inwardly.

The *Soliloquies* also demonstrates the restrictions of physical sight, stating that one cannot know God bodily and that before the senses can be trusted they must be accompanied by reason.

While the two texts agree that human sight is limited, they diverge when considering whether seeing is simply a way of describing understanding, or whether it can be a way of understanding in its own right. There are three examples in these texts of moments when bodily sight is used to further understanding: two in the *Boethius* and one in the *Soliloquies*. In both instances in the *Boethius*, man is advised to look at the heavens: first, in the case of men who desire fame, to compare the great expanse of heaven with the narrow limits of their celebrity; and second, in the case of those who wish to understand God's power, to observe the movements of the stars and see how perfectly they have been ordered.<sup>32</sup> In both of these examples, the onlooker is invited to reflect upon what he has seen and, in doing so, to draw wider conclusions about the universe. Seeing the movement of the stars is an integral part of the

<sup>31</sup> *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 309 (ch. 32, lines 53–55).

<sup>32</sup> *The Old English Boethius* vol. 1, 308 (ch. 32, lines 34–38); 87–88 (ch. 39, lines 332–348).

process of coming to understand God's ordering of the universe, and it is possible to move seamlessly from the sight of the stars to the wider, more abstract understanding implied by what is seen.

In contrast to the presentation of sight in the *Boethius*, the instance in which the *Soliloquies* shows sight to be an aid to understanding does so not through a manifestation of the thing to be understood, but through a symbol of that thing. In a passage original to the Old English text, Augustine is asked to consider how he learnt geometry:

on þam creft þu leornodest onn anum þoðere oðþe on æpple oððe on  
æge atefred það þu meahtest beo þære tefrunge ongytan þises roðores  
ymbbehwirft and þara tungla færeld.<sup>33</sup>

In this knowledge you learnt on a ball or on an apple or on a painted egg,  
so that you might understand the rotation of the heavens and the path of  
the stars by means of that example.

He is then asked whether he learnt with the eyes or with the mind, to which he responds:

mid ægðrum ic hyt geloernode: ærest myd ðam eagum, and syðþan myd  
þam ingeþance. ða eagan me gebrodton on þam angytte. Ac siðþan ic hyt  
þa ongyten hæfde, þa forlæt ic þa sceawunga mid þam eagum and þohte;  
forði me þuhte þæt ic (h)is mæte micle mare geþencan ðonne ic (h)is  
mahte geseon, siððan þa eagan hyt ætfæatnodon minum ingeþance.<sup>34</sup>

I learnt it with both: first with the eyes, and afterwards with the mind.  
The eyes brought me to the understanding, but when I had understood it  
I stopped looking with the eyes and I thought, because it seemed to me  
that I could think much more of it than I could see of it, once the eyes had  
fixed it in my mind.

Although this appears to suggest a correspondence between seeing and understanding, it differs from the examples in the *Boethius* in that the painted egg is only a symbol of the sky. In looking at the heavens in the *Boethius*, man marvels at God's ordering of the sky and from that draws conclusions about God's ordering of the universe more generally. In looking at the egg, Augustine is not

33 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 60, lines 16–18.

34 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 61, lines 13–17.

drawing understanding from the egg itself, but from the egg as a visual model upon which reason can work. Furthermore, in the *Soliloquies*, unlike in the *Boethius*, the author is careful to separate the processes of seeing and of understanding. Not only does this discussion of learning with the eyes and the mind go on to emphasise the impossibility of learning anything with the power of sight but without the power of reason, but it also has Augustine specifically state that he ceases to look at the egg before he begins to reflect upon the heavens. Sight is seen as a separate and inferior process to that of understanding, and reason is needed to provide evidence that the senses can be trusted, as Augustine acknowledges when Reason tells him:

me þincð nu þæt þu ne truwie ðam uttram gewitte, naðer ne þam eagum,  
ne þam earum, ne ðam stence, ne ðam swece, ne ðam hrinunge, ðað þu  
ðurh ðara ænig swa sweotole ongytan mæge þæt þæt þu woldest, buton  
þu hyt on þinum ingeþance ongytæ þurh ðin gescea(d)wisnesse.<sup>35</sup>

it now seems to me that you do not trust the external senses – neither the eyes, nor the ears, nor smell, nor taste, nor touch – or that through any of them you could understand so clearly that which you wish to understand, unless you understand it in your mind through your reason.

This difference in the philosophical treatment of sight is in line with the differing levels of explicitness in the metaphorical treatments of sight already described. In the *Soliloquies*, sight and understanding are kept clearly separated on a metaphorical level, with each element of the process of sight being explicitly equated with an element of the process of understanding. Similarly, sight is understood as functioning as a distinct and separate process from that of understanding, although the two processes are analogous. The author frequently repeats his assertions that God cannot be seen with the bodily senses, and that the body prevents the soul from seeing God during this life. He is adamant that the soul will see God after death, but this is an entirely spiritual form of sight in which the body plays no part. By contrast, sight and understanding in the *Boethius* are less clearly separated, and this correlates with the presentation of their interaction. While sight is still portrayed as a limited physical sense, it is nevertheless seen as capable of inspiring reflection and of prompting comprehension of God's universe.

Although the imagery of sight in the *Boethius* and the *Soliloquies* may originate with the Latin sources, it has been significantly developed by the

35 *Soliloquies*, ed. T.A. Carnicelli, 59, lines 5–8.

Anglo-Saxon translator. In particular, he shows sensitivity to the nuances of the connection between sight and understanding, varying his use of the metaphor to reflect the wider implications of his texts. Through examining the sight imagery in the *Boethius*, it is possible to see a correlation between the way that sight is treated and the structure of the text itself. The translator has shifted from the apparently external conversation between Boethius and Lady Philosophy in the Latin to a completely internal discussion between Mind, Wisdom, and Reason, three related mental faculties, in the Old English version. Similarly, sight and understanding are allowed to run into and influence each other, and the metaphors of sight work fluidly on multiple levels which must be drawn out by the reader. The *Soliloquies*, by contrast, are more regimented. The text is structured around the apparently external dialogue between Saint Augustine and Reason. Sight and understanding are clearly separated, and the metaphorical connections between them are explained. The differences in the treatment of sight imagery, therefore, point the reader towards more fundamental differences in the ways that the texts deal with their primary subject matter, the process of understanding.

Here we can see not only the similarities between the texts that lead scholars to argue for their common authorship, but also the differences which demonstrate the translator's skill. His alterations give insight into the understanding of sense perception in Anglo-Saxon England, but also warn us that translators did not necessarily use one single model for writing about the senses if variations could strengthen other parts of their arguments.

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## Coming to Past Senses: Vision, Touch and Their Metaphors in Anglo-Saxon Language and Culture

*Javier E. Díaz-Vera*

### Universality vs Culture-specificity in the MIND-AS-BODY Metaphor

In her study of polysemy and semantic change in ancient Indo-European languages, Sweetser shows that the vocabulary of physical perception has systematic metaphorical connections with the vocabulary of the internal self and internal sensations.<sup>1</sup> These connections are not random correspondences, but highly motivated links between parallel or analogous areas of physical and internal sensation. As these connections apparently show, vision plays a hegemonic role in human cognition, whereas the other senses (and, especially, touch, taste and smell) have relatively marginal cognitive functions.<sup>2</sup>

The assumption that vision has hegemony over the other senses is not without problems.<sup>3</sup> To start with, the visual model of knowledge advocated by ocularcentrism has implied a strong tendency to privilege vision over the other senses, producing the hegemony of the visual that characterizes Western

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1 Sweetser E., *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: 1990). Sweetser bases her theory on Lakoff G. – Johnson M., *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: 1980) and Lakoff G. – Johnson M., *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: 1999). For an earlier account of this view, see Bechtel F., *Über die Bezeichnungen der sinnlichen Wahrnehmungen in den indogermanischen Sprachen: Ein Breitrag zur Bedeutungsgeschichte* (Weimar: 1879); Kurath H., *The Semantic Sources of the Words for the Emotions in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and the Germanic Languages* (Menasha: 1921) and Buck C.D., *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Chicago: 1949).

2 The predominance of vision has a very long tradition in Western thought, and its roots go back to ancient Greek Philosophy; see, for example, Blumenthal H.J., *Plotinus's Psychology: His Doctrines of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague: 1971).

3 Jay M., "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism", *Poetics Today* 9, 2 (1988) 307–326; Jay M., *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: 1994).

cultures. On the methodological level, this hegemony of vision has implied a neglect not only of the study of the other four senses and of their roles in human cognition, but also of particular modes of vision (such as, for example, imagination, dreams and religious vision).

The alleged universality of the correspondences between physical perception and cognition implies two different things. To start with, by assuming that these links are universal, we must also assume that they are exclusively grounded in the physical nature of our human bodies (universal physiological traits) and, consequently, they do not reflect or take into consideration conceptual differences between specific cultures and sub-cultures.<sup>4</sup> This neglect of the role of culture in metaphorical conceptualization has favoured the progressive imposition of Western ocularcentrism on non-Western cultures and languages.<sup>5</sup> However, recent research in non-Western languages has quite strongly demonstrated that the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor is not universal and, consequently, it is subject to cultural variation.<sup>6</sup> What these languages show is not only that UNDERSTANDING/KNOWING IS SEEING is far from being universal, but also that the omnipresent Western perspective somehow 'pollutes' conceptual reality in the perception domain.<sup>7</sup> Of course, vision arguably plays a salient role in our conceptualization of the intellect, but this saliency is neither shared by all cultures nor present in the ancient Indo-European languages.

The connections between physical perception and cognition are not only culture-specific, but also subject to change through history.<sup>8</sup> Since the conceptual grounding of metaphors is based on both the body and culture, a study of

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4 The question of whether the conceptualizations of emotion concepts are universal across cultures or language/culture-specific has been a matter of research interest in cognitive linguistics and social anthropology; see, among many others, Kövecses Z., *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: 2005); Lakoff G., *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: 1987); Lutz C.A., *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: 1988); Maalej Z., "Figurative Language in Anger Expression in Tunis-Arabic: An Extended View of Embodiment", *Metaphor and Symbol* 19, 1 (2004) 51–75.

5 McMahan D., *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism* (London: 2013).

6 For a list of examples, see Caballero R. – Ibarretxe-Antuñano I., "Ways of Perceiving and Thinking: Re-Vindicating Culture in Conceptual Metaphor Research", *Cognitive Semiotics* 7 (2009) 268–290.

7 Howes D., *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: 2003).

8 Tyler S., "The Vision Quest in the West or What the Mind's Eye Sees", *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40 (1984) 23–40.

the linguistic history of the senses should try to overcome the limits imposed by universalist conceptions of the multiple relations between body and mind and to claim the role of culture in the development of *sensescaples*, that is, each culture's rich sensorial landscapes.<sup>9</sup> Based on these principles, I will propose here an analysis of the Old English vocabulary of vision and touch.<sup>10</sup> I have chosen these two senses for a variety of reasons. To start with, whereas sight has been traditionally considered our hegemonic sense, touch has been relegated to a peripheral role. By contrasting these two senses with each other, I will be able to identify conceptual differences in the way Old English languages construe a 'major' and a 'minor' sense. Second, and in spite of this controversial distinction, both vision and touch share a series of features in common: in fact, these are the only two senses where the object perceived does not have to go inside the perceiver in order to be perceived. Both senses, in fact, are considered external, and they are essential to our understanding of spatial relations.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I will propose reconstructions of the paths of semantic change through which the Old English vocabulary of visual and tactile perception was created (source domains of physical perception). Thereafter, I will identify some of the metaphorical uses of these linguistic expressions in Anglo-Saxon texts (physical perception as a source domain). My analysis focuses on the following three areas:

- (a) the **distribution** of perception metaphors – i.e., what perception metaphors existed in Old English and what is their degree of pervasiveness in a corpus of Old English texts;
- (b) the **motivation behind the use** of perception metaphors – i.e., what physiological factors can account for the development of these conceptual mappings between these specific domains; and
- (c) the **entrenchment** of perception metaphors – i.e., the ways in which Old English conceptualizations of vision and touch are embedded in Anglo-Saxon culture, as represented by a corpus of Old English texts.

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9 Majid A. – Levinson S., "The Senses in Language and Culture", *Sense and Society* 6, 1 (2011) 5–18.

10 OE = Old English. Other abbreviations used in this study include PrIde (Proto-Indo-European), PrGmc (Proto-Germanic), ME (Middle English), PDE (Present-Day-English), L (Latin).

11 Fulkerson M., *The First Sense: A Philosophical Study of Human Touch* (Chicago: 2013) 164.

### Physical Perception in the Old English Vocabulary: Origins and Evolution

My study of the Old English vocabulary of perception is based on the evidence provided by the *Thesaurus of Old English*.<sup>12</sup> Using the TOE, I have made a list of all the verbs expressing physical perception (vision and touching) in Old English. Thereafter, these lexical units have been grouped into expressions.<sup>13</sup> In the next stage, all the Old English expressions used to refer to the same sense will be classified into etymological themes (in SMALL CAPS), a term I will use here in order to refer to the etymological source domain for each Old English expression.<sup>14</sup> Finally, etymological themes are grouped into literal and figurative expressions. Following Geeraert and Gevaert,<sup>15</sup> I will assume here that if the sense-related reading is the dominant sense of a word, it is to be considered literal. Conversely, figurative expressions are nonprototypical ones. In the case of figurative expressions, these etymological themes indicate the source domains on which Old English perception metonymies and metaphors are based.<sup>16</sup> Finally, I will make a list of some of the semantic extensions from the source domain PHYSICAL PERCEPTION to other target domains developed in Anglo-Saxon culture and thought.

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- 12 Hence TOE; Roberts J. – Kay C. (eds.), *A Thesaurus of Old English* (London: 1995). Other dictionaries used for this study are Bosworth J. – Toller T.N. (eds.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: 1898) and diPaolo A. et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Old English* (Toronto: 1994), hence DOE. For the reconstruction of processes of semantic change in Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic I have used Pokorny J. (ed.), *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern: 1959).
  - 13 A term I will use here in order to refer to a lexical root and all its morphological derivations (such as, for example, new verbs created by prefixation or suffixation) and its orthographical, declensional and inflectional variants.
  - 14 Geeraerts D. – Gevaert C., “Hearts and (Angry) Minds in Old English”, in Sharifian F. – Dirven R. – Yu N. (eds.), *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs across Cultures and Languages* (Berlin: 2008) 326–327.
  - 15 Geeraerts – Gevaert, “Hearts and (Angry) Minds in Old English” 327.
  - 16 According to the standard definition, the distinction between these two concepts is based on the domain-external and domain-internal nature of metaphor and metonymy, respectively. This distinction implies that whereas metonymies are built upon a single conceptual domain, in such a way that one of the domains is already part of the other, in metaphor the source and the target domains are different; Ruiz de Mendoza F.J., “Metaphor, Metonymy and Conceptual Interaction”, *Atlantis* 19, 1 (1997) 281–295.

## The Origins of Old English Visual Perception Verbs

According to the TOE (02.05.09.04), there existed in Old English 18 different verbs meaning ‘to see, look upon, behold’. These lexical units can be grouped into 9 expressions, which I have arranged on the basis of their numbers of occurrences in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*:<sup>17</sup>

1. **sēon (ca. 1300)**: *āsēon* (2), *besēon* (ca. 375), *ofsēon* (8), *onsēon* (13), *(ge)sēon* (ca. 900)
2. **healdan (ca. 750)**: *behealdan* (ca. 750)
3. **scēawian (ca. 500)**: *(ge)scēawian* (ca. 500)
4. **lōcian (ca. 385)**: *belōcian* (2), *(ge)lōcian* (ca. 350), *onlōcian* (32)
5. **gietan (ca. 135)**: *ongietan* (ca. 135)
6. **wlītan (23)**: *bewlītan* (1), *wlītan* (22)
7. **hāwian (22)**: *(ge)hāwian* (21), *onhāwian* (1)
8. **wlātian (20)**: *bewlātian* (4), *wlātian* (16)
9. **capian (2)**: *capian* (2)

As can be seen here, Anglo-Saxon texts use nine different expressions to refer to vision; however, whereas the most general types of vision corresponded to the expressions *sēon*, *healdan*, *scēawian* and *lōcian*, the remaining five expressions were used to express more specific types of vision. Using Pokorny’s dictionary, I will now analyze the etymological origins of each individual expression in order to try to reconstruct paths of semantic change in the formation of the Old English vocabulary of vision.

Following the general correspondence between ideas and objects described above, vision is construed as physical touching, manipulation and control in Old English. This link is clearly expressed by the two vision expressions most frequently used by Anglo-Saxon speakers, both of which are etymologically derived from original touch-verbs: OE *sēon* (from the Proto-Germanic strong verb *\*sehwa-* ‘to see’, apparently derived from PIE *\*seku-* ‘to follow [with the eyes]’), and OE *healdan* (which is a metaphorical extension from PGmc *\*hāldan* ‘to hold something, to keep guard of something’). Very similarly, OE *gietan* derives from PrIde *\*ghend-*, a root originally meaning ‘to grasp, seize, take hold of’, which come to express ‘vision’, ‘hearing’ and ‘general perception’ in Old English. Also, OE *capian* (derived from PrGmc *\*kap-* ‘to watch’) is related to OE *cepan* ‘to keep’, and refers to the action of keeping watch over something.

17 Hence DOE; diPaolo A. et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus in Electronic Form* (Toronto: 2000).

According to these four expressions, most Old English vision verbs were developed diachronically on the basis of the metaphorical mappings SEEING IS TOUCHING, EYES ARE LIMBS and LOOKING AT SOMETHING IS TOUCHING IT WITH THE EYES OR GLANCE.<sup>18</sup> Here are some illustrations of the uses of these verbs in the Old English corpus:<sup>19</sup>

- (1) Rid. 87:  
*Ic seah wundorlice with.*  
 I saw a wonderful creature.
  
- (2) HomU 18:  
*englas hie georne beheoldan of þæm dæge þe hie wiston þæt heo seo eadige Maria geeacnod wæs of þæm Halgan Gasten.*  
 Angels looked earnestly upon her from the day they knew that the blessed Mary had conceived of the Holy Spirit.
  
- (3) Bt. 38,3:  
*Gif ðū gesihst hwylcne ungesælige mon and ongītst hwæthwegu gōdes on him.*  
 If you see a miserable man and perceive something good in him.

The expressions OE *scēawian* and OE *hāwian* are derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*(s)keu-*, originally meaning both ‘to see’ and ‘to hear’ (as in OE *hīeran*). The semantic connection between hearing and vision clearly reflects the synaesthetic metaphorical mappings VISUAL SIGNALS ARE SOUNDS and SEEING IS HEARING, according to which hearing something corresponds to visualizing that same thing mentally. For example, whereas in (4) the experience sees something abstract (i.e., SEEING SOMETHING THAT IS NOT VISIBLE IS HEARING), in (5) ocular vision is prevented by looking downwards (as a sign of heeding and obedience; i.e., LOOKING DOWNWARDS IS HEARING ATTENTIVELY).

18 Lakoff G. – Espenson J. – Schwartz A., *Master Metaphor List* (Berkeley: 1991) 129.

19 All the examples used in this research have been extracted from the DOEC. Text names are indicated by an acronym before each example; these acronyms correspond to the Old English short titles included in the DOEC List of Texts (<http://doe.utoronto.ca/pages/index.html>). Unless there is a reference to the text from which a translation is copied, the translations are my own.

- (4) Ps.Th. 90,8:  
*Ðū ðæs ēagan eall scēawadest gesēge fyrenfulra wīte.*  
 With your eyes you will look and see the punishment of the sinners.
- (5) Homl.Th. li.442,8:  
*Nȳtene gelīc ðe hāwaf symle tō ðære eorþan.*  
 Like a beast that never looks downwards.

As for the remaining Old English verbs of vision, they have not been subject to processes of semantic change. This is the case of the expressions OE *wlātian* and OE *wlitan*, both of which are derived from PrIde \**uel-* ‘to see’. Also, the expression *lōcian* is derived from PrGmc \**lōkōjan* ‘to see, look, spy’, a root recorded exclusively in Germanic languages.

- (6) Beo.Th. 1916:  
*se ðe ær lange tīd feor wlātode.*  
 He who already for a long time gazed far.
- (7) Met 31.14:  
*Wuhta gehwylc [...] on weoruld wlīteþ.*  
 Every creature [...] looks at the world.
- (8) PPs. 118.2.2a:  
*Gif ic on ealle ðīne beboðu lōcie.*  
 I look at all your commandments.

Based on this part of my analysis, I will propose the following classification of Old English vision verbs:

TABLE 1 *The semantic-etymological origins of OE vision verbs*

Theme	OE Expression	Semantics	n°
VISUAL PERCEPTION	<i>lōcian, wlātian, wlitan</i>	literal	427
HEARING PERCEPTION	<i>scēawian, hāwian</i>	synaesthetic	±522
– SEEING IS HEARING		metaphor	
– SIGNALS ARE SOUNDS			



Theme	OE Expression	Semantics	n°
TACTILE PERCEPTION	<i>sēon, healdan, gietan,</i>	synaesthetic	
– SEEING IS TOUCHING	<i>capian</i>	metaphor	±2100 ±3049
– EYES ARE ARMS			
– SIGNALS ARE POSSESSIONS			

According to these results, Anglo-Saxons conceptualized vision either as TOUCHING SOMETHING WITH THE EYES or, less frequently, as HEARING ABOUT SOMETHING TO CREATE A MENTAL IMAGE. The connection between vision and touch is well-known to philosophers and science historians: ancient and early modern theories of vision understood sight as being a form of touch, so that seeing an object was analogous to touching it.<sup>20</sup> Based on this connection, Old English establishes a strong correspondence between the lexical domains of ‘vision/touching’ and ‘control/possession’, so that a perceiver can control an external object, place or event with the eyes in the same fashion as they can handle it with the hands. A direct consequence of this type of visual perception, as shall be seen later, is that the perceiver produces an effect on the object of perception under his/her control (protecting it, guiding it or changing its trajectory).

Very few Proto-Indo-European vision verbs survived in Old English, as most of them either disappeared or changed their meaning: this is the case of, for example, the general vision verb *PrIde* \**w(e)id-* (cf. L *videō* ‘to see’), a root that lost its perception meaning in the Germanic languages (cf. OE *wisan* ‘to show the way, to guide’) to become a verb of cognition, as in OE *witan* OE *witan* ‘to see > to learn from experience’. This Old English verb refers to knowledge as a result of personal experience, as in the case of political advisors (the so-called *witan* ‘wisemen’), historians and counsellors. This semantic path confirms the strong connection between vision and knowledge.

(9) HomsS. 46:

*Frunan maran þinges þonne ænges mannes gemet wære her on eorðan, þæt hit witan mihte.*

He asked further about that thing the only man that he had met on earth who may know it.

20 Foti V., *Vision's Invisibles: Philosophical Explanations* (New York: 2003) 43–44.

## The Origins of Old English Tactile Perception Verbs

After this analysis of the most relevant source domains for Old English vision verbs, I will now turn my attention to the analysis of the set of Old English verbs of touching; to the four touch verbs listed in the TOE (namely OE *fēlan*, *hrepian*, *hrīnan* and *tillan*), I have added OE *frēdan*, *grāpian* and *grētan* (based on the definitions proposed by the DOE). This makes a total of 18 different lexical units, grouped into seven expressions:

1. **hrīnan (ca. 350)**: *āhrīnan* (12), *æthrīnan* (ca. 110), *hrīnan* (ca. 90), *gehrīnan* (c. 120), *onhrīnan* (ca. 28)
2. **hrepian (ca. 198)**: *āhrepian* (1), *hrepian* (ca. 135), *gehrepian* (62)
3. **fēlan (ca. 100)**: *fēlan* (ca. 10), *gefēllan* (ca. 60)
4. **frēdan (ca. 76)**: *frēdan* (6), *gefrēdan* (ca. 70)
5. **grāpian (ca. 51)**: *grāpian* (ca. 40), *gegrāpian* (11)
6. **tillan (ca. 27)**: *ātillan* (2), *tillan* (ca. 15), *getillan* (ca. 10)
7. **grētan (15)**: *grētan* (15)

As can be seen here, the most frequently used verb of tactile perception in the DOE is OE *hrīnan*, followed by *hrepian* and *fēlan*. OE *hrīnan* derives from a West Germanic root meaning ‘to touch’. Together with OE *fēlan*, which derives from PrIde *\*pel-* ‘skin, palm of the hand’ and became ‘to explore by touch’ in Proto-Germanic, these two verbs represent the literal expression of tactile perception in Old English. Old English touching verbs are, in fact, highly conservative related to their linguistic antecessors, and figurative expressions are less frequent.

- (10) Mk.Skt.Rush. 1,41:  
*Se hāelend hrān him.*  
 The Lord touched him.

- (11) ÆHomM 1,269:  
*Heo hit ne fæleð.*  
 She did not touch it.

OE *hrepian* (from a Germanic root meaning ‘to obtain’), OE *grāpian* (from PrIde *ghreib-* ‘to grip, grab’) and OE *tillan* (corresponding to a Germanic root meaning ‘to reach, attain’) illustrate the metonymic mapping TOUCHING SOMETHING IS REACHING IT WITH THE HAND, where physical perception

is the direct result of the act of reaching something or somebody in order to make physical contact with it. Here are some examples of some of the uses of these verbs:

- (12) Hom.Th.i 392,15:

*Se ðe ēow hrepap hit mē biþ swā egle swylce hē hreppe ða sēo mīnes ēagan.*  
He that touches you, it will be as painful to me as if he touches the apple of my eye.

- (13) Hom.Th.ii 134,35:

*Se cuma his cnēow grāpode mid his hālwendum handum.*  
The stranger felt his knee with his healing hands.

- (14) Gen (L) 11.4:

*Cumað & utan wircan us ane burh & ænne stypel swa heahne ðæt his rof atille þa heofonan.*  
Come and build a city and a tower so high that its roof touches the sky.

OE *grētan* derives from PrIde *\*gher-*, a verb originally meaning ‘to make a sound’, illustrating the synaesthetic mappings LISTENING TO SOMEBODY IS BEING TOUCHED (AT A DISTANCE) BY HIS/HER VOICE, EARS ARE HANDS and SOUNDS ARE OBJECTS.<sup>21</sup>

- (15) LS 5 (InventCrossNap) 250:

*þa halgæ gyrden gretton & heom ðærto bedon.*  
They touched the holy rod and prayed.

Of special interest here is the semantic change from PrIde *\*pret-* ‘to understand’ (as in OE *frōd* ‘wise’) to OE *frēdan* ‘to feel the touch of, to be aware of physical contact with’ (DOE), that is, from mental cognition to physical perception. This semantic evolution, in fact, contradicts the general direction from concrete to abstract that typically governs most of the changes related to the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor.<sup>22</sup>

21 A study of the scope of these synaesthetic metaphors in Present-Day English can be found in Bretones Calleja C.M., “Synaesthetic Metaphors in English”, *International Computers Science Institute Technical Reports* (2001) 1–23.

22 Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics* 17–18.

TABLE 2     *The semantic-etymological origins of OE touching verbs*

Theme	OE Expression	Semantics	n°
TACTILE PERCEPTION	<i>hrīnan, fēlan</i>	literal	±450
TOUCHING IS REACHING	<i>hrepian, grāpian, tillan</i>	metonymy	±276
LISTENING IS BEING TOUCHED (AT A DISTANCE)	<i>grētan</i>	synaesthetic metaphor	15
– EARS ARE HANDS			
– ARMS ARE SOUNDS			
TOUCHING IS UNDERSTANDING	<i>frēdan</i>	metaphor	±27    ±768

(16) ÆCHom I, 14.1 (B) 296.187:  
*þa fredde þe deofel þone angel þe he ær gredelic forswearh.*  
The devil touched the angel that he would greedily devour.

Table 2 represents the results of this part of my analysis. As can be seen here, there is a strong preference for literal touch expressions, followed by touch metonymies and, finally, metaphors.

The Distribution of Old English Vision Metaphors

Using the HTOED,<sup>23</sup> I will now propose a reconstruction of the figurative meanings expressed by some of these visual perception verbs in Old English, and of the conceptual mappings represented by these processes of semantic extension. In order to do so, I have searched each Old English verb in the digital version of the thesaurus in order to make a list of all its meanings, as recorded in texts written during the Anglo-Saxon period. The general results of this part of my analysis can be seen in Table 3:

23     HTOED = Kay C. – Roberts J. – Samuels M. – Wotherspoon I., *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: 2009).

TABLE 3 *The scope of Old English vision metaphors*

Mapping	OE Expression
KEEPING GUARD OVER SOMETHING IS SEEING	<i>hāwian, healdan, lōcian</i>
TAKING CARE THAT SOMETHING BE DONE IS SEEING	<i>hāwian, lōcian, sēon</i>
TAKING NOTICE OF SOMETHING IS SEEING	<i>hāwian, gīetan, healdan</i>
PAYING ATTENTION TO SOMETHING IS SEEING	<i>healdan, lōcian, scēawian</i>
INVESTIGATING/EXAMINING IS SEEING	<i>scēawian, lōcian, healdan</i>
CALLING FOR ATTENTION IS SEEING	<i>sēon, lōcian</i>
UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS SEEING	<i>sēon, gietan</i>
FINDING OUT BY INVESTIGATION IS SEEING	<i>sēon, gietan</i>
RECOGNIZING/ACKNOWLEDGING IS SEEING	<i>sēon, gietan</i>
RETAINING/SEIZING IS SEEING	<i>gietan, healdan</i>
OBSERVING AN AGREEMENT IS SEEING	<i>healdan, lōcian</i>
CARRYING OUT A PROMISE/LAW IS SEEING	<i>healdan, lōcian</i>
TAKING UP (SPACE/A PLACE) IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
BEING EFFICACIOUS IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
PROTECTING/DEFENDING IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
BEING VIGILANT/ON ONE'S GUARD IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
MEANING IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
RESTRAINING IS SEEING	<i>healdan</i>
FORMING/HOLDING AN OPINION IS SEEING	<i>gietan</i>
HEARING IS SEEING	<i>gietan</i>
FEELING AN EMOTION IS SEEING	<i>gietan</i>
HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS SEEING	<i>gietan</i>
IMAGINING/VISUALIZING IS SEEING	<i>sēon</i>
BEING AWARE IS SEEING	<i>sēon</i>
VISITING IS SEEING	<i>sēon</i>
EXPERIENCING/SUFFERING IS SEEING	<i>sēon</i>
CONSIDERING/DELIBERATING IS SEEING	<i>scēawian</i>
FORESEEING IS SEEING	<i>scēawian</i>
MAKING A DECREE IS SEEING	<i>scēawian</i>
CHOOSING IS SEEING	<i>scēawian</i>
REGARDING WITH KINDLY FEELINGS IS SEEING	<i>hāwian</i>

Based on the number of Old English verbs that undergo each semantic extension, Table 3 shows that the most frequent semantic changes from Old English vision verbs into other domains are related to the mappings KEEPING GUARD OVER SOMETHING IS SEEING, TAKING CARE THAT SOMETHING BE DONE IS SEEING, TAKING NOTICE OF SOMETHING IS SEEING, INVESTIGATING/ EXAMINING SOMETHING IS SEEING and PAYING ATTENTION TO SOMETHING IS SEEING. The uses of the verb OE *behealdan* in the five examples below illustrate these five correspondences:

- (17) GD 1 (C) 3.24.10:

ic þe bebeode on drihtnes naman hælendes Cristes, þæt þu ða stigole **behealde**, & þu ne læte þone þeof her ingangan.

In God's name I ask you to keep guard on the entry and to prevent the thief from coming in.

- (18) PsTh 13.3:

*Drihten lōcap of heofenum and hāwap hwæðer hē gesēo ænigne ðæra ðe hine sēce oððe hine ongite.*

God sees from heaven and takes care of those who understand or seek God.

- (19) ÆCHom II, 2 16.150:

*þæt folc **beheold** þone broðer standan buton atelicere cwacunge.*

They took notice of the brother standing without the horrible quaking.

- (20) Leof 77:

*ða **beheold** he hit þa gyt geornor, þa geseah he ealle þa rode swa swutole, swylce þær nan þing beforan nære.*

He examined it even more intensely and he saw the complete cross so clearly as if there had never been anything before it.

- (21) MtGl (Li) 6.28:

***behaues** ðæt wyrð londes huu wæxas.*

Pay attention to how the plants grow in the fields.

These five meanings are clearly connected to the original metaphorical mapping SEEING SOMETHING IS TOUCHING IT WITH THE EYES: in fact, they imply a perceiver fixing his/her attention on the object of perception during a sufficiently long period of time so as to observe it or to take care of it. Visual perception is not the result of a casual contact between a perceiver and an

object of perception but, rather, of a voluntary, attentive and prolonged observation. As a result of this process of observation, the perceiver will either (1) protect the object of perception (PROTECTING IS SEEING); or (2) realize its existence (REALIZING IS SEEING) or one of its qualities (EXAMINING IS SEEING). Identical semantic extensions are illustrated by many other mappings included in Table 3, such as:

- PROTECTING IS SEEING: 'protecting/defending', 'being vigilant/on one's guard'.
- REALIZING IS SEEING: 'calling for attention', 'recognizing/acknowledging', 'being aware', 'experiencing/suffering'.
- EXAMINING IS SEEING: 'considering/deliberating'.

Another pervasive mapping is related to the capacity of the perceiver to exert control on the perceived entity by looking at it (CONTROLLING IS SEEING), as can be seen in the extensions RETAINING/SEIZING IS SEEING, OBSERVING AN AGREEMENT IS SEEING, CARRYING OUT A PROMISE/LAW IS SEEING, TAKING UP (SPACE/A PLACE) IS SEEING, RESTRAINING IS SEEING and MAKING A DECREE IS SEEING. In these cases, vision is related either to observance of a rule or to obedience and submission, a domain normally construed on the basis of 'hearing' verbs.<sup>24</sup> This connection between vision and hearing can also be illustrated by the synaesthetic metaphor HEARING IS SEEING.

(22) O.E. Chron. (Laud. MS) an. 1048:

*ƿa [...] sceawede him mann. v. nihta grið ut of lande to farenne.*

Here he decreed five days of safe-conduct to abandon the country.

The cognition metaphor UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS SEEING comprises not only the mapping 'understanding/seeing', but also 'finding out by investigation', 'forming/holding an opinion' and 'meaning is seeing'. Furthermore, when the object of perception is not something physical, OE *sēon* undergoes a semantic shift from physical vision to mental vision, as indicated by the mapping IMAGINING/VISUALIZING IS SEEING:

(23) Ps.Th. 5,3:

*ƿic sēo ðē, ðæt is, ðæt ic ongite ðinne willan būtan twēon.*

I see you, that is, I understand your will and also perform it.

24 Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics* 38.

- (24) Ps.Th 118,153. 24,8:

*Mīn ēadmēdu geseah.*

He saw my humiliation.

Another type of knowledge, acquired not through personal experience but through revelation, is expressed through the Old English weak verb *scēawian* ‘to look at’ > ‘to see spiritually, to foresee’, as in the case of prophets, priests and poets. In its primary sense, OE *scēawian* was used to refer to the capacity to see things that are difficult to observe by other people, either because they are hidden or because they cannot be easily interpreted (as in [5]), as in the mapping FORESEEING IS SEEING.

- (25) *ÆAbusMor* 254:

*Episcopus is grecisc nama þæt is on leden speculator & on englisc sceawere.*

*Episcopus* is a Greek name that is in Latin *speculator* and in English *sceawere*.

Spiritual vision is thus conceived of as a revelation of another level of reality, which was not easily observable by ordinary people.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Old English vision verbs can also be used to express feelings and emotions: this is the case of OE *gietan* ‘to feel an emotion’ and OE *hāwian* ‘to regard someone with kindly feelings’.

- (26) Bt. 4:

*Drihten hāwa nū mildelīce on ðās earman eorþan.*

Lord, look now mercifully on this miserable earth.

All in all, these semantic extensions indicate a strong connection between (1) touch, vision and knowledge (as a result of personal experience, as in OE *sēon*) on the one side, and between (2) hearing, vision and learning (from others’ experience, as in OE *scēawian*) on the other. This model of knowledge based on visual perception is, however, secondary in Old English, and as can be seen in Table 2, only few Old English vision verbs developed secondary meanings within the general field of ‘understanding/knowledge’. Much more frequently, Anglo-Saxon speakers developed metonymic extensions from ‘vision’ to ‘taking care’, ‘controlling’ and ‘watching over, guarding, defending’.

25 Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics* 40.



### The Distribution of Old English Touch Metaphors

I will now propose a reconstruction of the secondary meanings expressed by some of these tactile perception verbs listed above, and of the conceptual metonymies and metaphors represented by these semantic extensions.

The results in Table 4 show that Old English was rich in figurative senses derived from originally tactile perception verbs, which is in clear contrast with

TABLE 4 *The scope of Old English touching metaphors*

Mapping	OE Expression
DAMAGING/ATTACKING IS TOUCHING	<i>hrīnan, hrepian, grētan, grētan</i>
AFFECTING WITH EMOTION IS TOUCHING	<i>hrīnan, hrepian, fēlan, frēdan</i>
REACHING IS TOUCHING	<i>hrīnan, grāpian, tillan</i>
AFFLICTING IS TOUCHING	<i>hrīnan, grētan, frēdan</i>
HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS TOUCHING	<i>hrīnan, grētan, gietan</i>
DEALING WITH IS TOUCHING	<i>hrepian, grētan</i>
TREATING (AS A DOCTOR) IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
GREETING/SALUTING IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
ADDRESSING RESPECTFULLY IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
HOLDING A DISCUSSION IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
SPEAKING TO SOMEBODY IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
DENYING AN ACCUSATION IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
BEING ANNOYED/VEXED IS BEING TOUCHED	<i>grētan</i>
WEEPING IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
PLAYING (AN INSTRUMENT) IS TOUCHING	<i>grētan</i>
EXAMINING (IN THE DARK) IS TOUCHING	<i>grāpian</i>
SEARCHING (IN THE DARK) IS TOUCHING	<i>grāpian</i>
ACTING BLINDLY/STUPIDLY IS TOUCHING	<i>grāpian</i>
WRITING ABOUT IS TOUCHING	<i>hrepian</i>
MENTIONING IS TOUCHING	<i>hrepian</i>
BLAMING IS TOUCHING	<i>hrepian</i>
APPREHENDING IS TOUCHING	<i>frēdan</i>

Sweetser's assumption on the secondary character of touching in cognition.<sup>26</sup> In fact, whereas Sweetser assumes that the sense of touch is closely tied to emotional feeling in most Indo-European languages, my Old English data is highly indicative of the relevance of tactile perception in processes of recognition, apprehension and examination of external objects, facts and ideas (as in OE *hrepian*, *frēdan*, *grāpian*).

(27) Homl.Th. i.88.8:

*He gefrēdde his dēapes nēalācunge.*

He knew of his death's approach.

Furthermore, these expressions (and, especially, OE *grāpian* and its derivatives) illustrate the conceptual correspondences TOUCHING IS SEEING and TOUCHING IS KNOWING (this one applies especially to those occasions where actual visual perception is impeded by, for example, darkness or blindness).

(28) Blickl.Homl. 151, 6:

*Hie wurdon sōna ablinde and grāpodan mid heora handum on ða eorþan.*

They at once became blind and groped on the ground with their hands.

The later history of OE *grāpian* shows, in fact, a progressive semantic extension into the domains of 'investigation' and 'knowledge', as in the following Middle English examples:

(29) A1225 Ancr, R. 314:

*Unneaðe, þauh a last, þuruh þen abbodes gropunge, he hit seide.*

With difficulty, however at last, through the searching exhortations of the abbot, he told it.

(30) c1386 Chaucer Prol. 646:

*Who so koulde in oothur thing hym grope Thanne hadde he spent al his Philosophie.*

But for anyone who knows how to examine him in other matters, he had used up all his learning.

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26 Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics* 37.

Besides these extensions into the domain of cognition, Old English verbs of touching developed a series of semantic shifts into the domains of feeling and emotion (as in AFFLICTING IS TOUCHING OR AFFECTING WITH EMOTION IS TOUCHING). This is the case of OE *hrīnan*, *hrepian*, *fēlan* and *frēdan*: in most cases, the result of perception is either a painful feeling (such as ‘to hurt, wound’) or a negative emotion (especially sadness and grief).

- (31) Homl.Th. i.88.8:

*Hī swurdes ecge ne gefrēddon.*  
They felt not the sword's edge.

- (32) Cd. 33:

*Swā hit him on innan com hrān æt heortan.*  
So it came within him, touched him at his heart.

The verb OE *grētan* developed a wide range of secondary senses during the Anglo-Saxon period. In most cases, these new senses are related to the expression of different types of interpersonal relationships, such as ‘greeting/saluting’ (referred to the action of shaking hands or hugging), ‘holding a discussion’ (related to ‘to deal with’) or ‘having sexual intercourse’ (probably based either on the biblical metaphor HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS KNOWING OR, more simply, on the metonymic connection between ‘touching’ and ‘sexual intercourse’).

- (33) LS 18.1 (NatMaryAss 10N) 400:

*ða steorde Mariæ him & cwæð andredlice: ne wurðæp þæt næfre swa, þæt ic wer grete oððe wer me.*  
Mary prohibited it to him and said resolutely: it cannot be said that I ever knew a man or that a man knew me.

Also, OE *grētan* is used to refer to the action of treating a patient (as a doctor), in so far as doctors use their hands to examine and to treat their patients.

- (34) Lch II (3) 22.1.5:

*gif se brīw & se drenc inne gewuniað þu meht þone man gelacnian, gif him of fleogeth him bið selre þæt þu hine na ne grete.*  
If the pottage and the drink remain inside him, you might heal that person; if it flows out of him, it is better that you do not treat him.

Finally, the expression OE *hrepian* is used in Anglo-Saxon texts to refer to the topic dealt with by a written text, as well as to indicate that somebody is guilty of something:

(35) Angl.viii.300,21:

*Ðās þing wē swā hwōnlīce hēr hrepiað on foreweardum worce, for ðan wē hig þenceað oftor tō hrepian and tō gemunanne.*

We touch these things so briefly in the preface of this work because we intend to deal with them and recall them more often.

### Motivation of Old English Vision and Touch Metaphors

The senses are our principal avenues for obtaining knowledge about the world.<sup>27</sup> This implies that we are biologically constrained by the physiology of the senses. Consequently, the way in which each sense informs us about the world around us is different, and each sense modality makes us perceive certain stimuli and interpret the same reality in a particular manner. Many of the conceptual mappings identified above are in fact grounded in our experience, that is, in the way we, as human beings, interact, understand and use our perceptual capacities. However, in spite of the universal character of human physiology, different cultures may rely on different senses to gather information, and they may do so in different ways, and not necessarily reflect Western models of sense perception. The interaction of bodily and cultural constraints is, according to Johnson and Lakoff, the locus of experience, meaning and thought.<sup>28</sup> That being so, a study of the exact ways cultural beliefs shape our understanding of the world should be preceded by an identification of the purely embodied constraints on sensorial experiences and on the figurative expressions that arise from these experiences.<sup>29</sup>

Based on these premises, Ibarretxe-Antuñano offers a list of properties that may characterize the source domain of perception.<sup>30</sup> These properties are

27 Ingold T. – Howes D., “Worlds of Sense and Sensing the World”, *Social Anthropology* 19, 3 (2011) 313–331.

28 Johnson M. – Lakoff G., “Why Cognitive Linguistics Requires Embodied Realism”, *Cognitive Linguistics* 3 (2002) 245–264.

29 Gibbs R., “Cognitive Linguistics and Metaphor Research: Past Successes, Skeptical Questions, Future Challenges”, *DELTA* 22 (2006) 1–20.

30 See Ibarretxe-Antuñano I., *Polysemy and Metaphor in Perception Verbs: A Cross-Linguistic Study*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Edinburgh: 1999) and “The Power of the Senses

not *ad hoc* labels based on intuitions, but assumed properties of the senses extrapolated from literature on both the physiology of the senses (i.e., biology of the senses) and the psychology of the senses (i.e., folk models of the senses). Definitions for each property are based on the relationship among the three main elements that participate in a perceptual act: the person that carries out the perception or perceiver (PR), the object – animate or inanimate – being perceived (OP) and the act of perception itself (P).

TABLE 5 *Properties in perception*<sup>31</sup>

<contact>	whether the PR must have a physical contact with the OP in order to be perceived
<closeness>	whether the OP must be in the vicinity of the PR to be perceived
<internal>	whether the OP must go inside the PR to be perceived
<limits>	whether the PR is aware of the boundaries imposed by the OP when perceived
<location>	whether the PR is aware of the situation of the OP when perceiving
<detection>	how the PR performs the P: how PR discloses the presence of an object, and distinguishes one object from another
<identification>	how well the PR can discriminate what he is perceiving, the OP
<voluntary>	whether the PR can choose when to perform a P
<directness>	whether the P depends on the PR directly, or is mediated by another element
<effects>	whether the P causes any change in the OP
<briefness>	how long the relation between P and OP should be in order for the perception to be successful
<evaluation>	whether the P assesses the OP
<correction-of-hypothesis>	how correct and accurate the hypotheses formulated about the OP in the P are in comparison with the real object of P
<subjectivity>	how much influence the PR has on the P

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and the Role of Culture in Metaphor and Language", in Caballero R. – Díaz-Vera J.E. (eds.), *Sensuous Cognition: Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception* (Berlin 2013) 109–133.

31 Ibarretxe-Antuñano, "Power of the Senses" 117.

Table 6 shows the distribution of these properties in each sense. As can be seen here, both vision and touch are external senses, that is, they are the only senses where the object perceived does not have to go inside the perceiver in order to be perceived. However, whereas touch requires physical contact and closeness between the perceiver and the perceived object, vision does not need either of these two properties. Similarly, vision implies that the perceiver is aware of the location of the perceived object, whereas touch implies that the perceiver is aware of the boundaries imposed by the perceived object when perceived (space perception).

Furthermore, whereas vision allows the formulation of a correct and accurate hypothesis about the perceived object by the perceiver, this property does not apply to touch. Finally, whereas vision allows the perceiver to make judgments on the basis of the information perceived, touch is characterized by (1) the physical changes that can be produced by the hands of the perceiver on the perceived object during the perception process; and (2) the briefness of the perception process (a very brief touch on a surface is enough to determine many of its physical features).

TABLE 6 *Distribution of properties in the senses*<sup>32</sup>

Elem.	Property	Vision	Hearing	Touch	Smell	Taste
PR → OP	<contact>	no	no	yes	no	yes
	<closeness>	no	no	yes	yes	yes
	<internal>	no	yes	no	yes	yes
	<limits>			yes		
	<location>	yes	yes		no	
	<subjectivity>				yes	yes
PR → P	<detection>	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	<identification>	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
	<voluntary>	yes	no	yes	no	yes
	<directness>	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
	<correction-of-hypothesis>	yes	yes		yes	
OP → P	<effects>			yes		
	<evaluation>	yes				yes
	<briefness>			yes		yes

32 Ibarretxe-Antuñano, "Power of the Senses" 118.

Taking Ibarretxe-Antuñano's set of properties as my starting hypothesis, I will now illustrate some of the differences between sight and touch described above using a selection of the conceptual mappings previously described for Old English sensorial perception.

1. SEEING IS TOUCHING (as represented by the verbs OE *sēon*, *healdan*, *gietan*, *capian*): As has been seen above, this conceptual mapping contributed to the development of the most important section of Old English vision verbs, including OE *sēon* and OE *healdan*. The semantic extension from 'touching' to 'vision' relies on the properties shared by both sensorial modalities, especially <internal<sub>no</sub>> and <voluntary<sub>yes</sub>>: in fact, like 'touching', 'vision' is voluntary and does not require the object of perception to go inside the perceiver when perceiving. The type of 'vision' originally developed from 'touch' verbs implies changes in the properties <closeness<sub>yes>no</sub>>, <contact<sub>yes>no</sub>> and <effects<sub>>yes</sub>>, that is, the perceiver figuratively touches the object perceived, having an effect on it (such as, for example, controlling it), which explains why most of these touch verbs came to express 'close vision' (as in 'keeping guard, protecting' or 'seeing with regard') first, and 'general vision' later.
2. SEEING IS HEARING (as in OE *ongietan*): This conceptual mapping, which is at the basis of the semantic developments that affected OE *scēawian* and *hāwian*, implies an internalization of the perceived object, which is inside the perceiver. Furthermore, the perception process is neither <voluntary> nor <direct> (i.e., hearing perception requires the perceived entity to produce a sound, so that our perception of this entity is mediated by that sound). That being so, we can assume that when these hearing verbs first came to express vision they were used to refer to such things as 'listening to a text being read aloud by someone else' (i.e., a type of vision that is internal, involuntary and requires a third entity to produce a perceptual signal).

(36) Exon.Th. 175,11:  
*Ic ðæs þēodnes word ongeat.*  
 I heard the words of the prince.

3. FINDING OUT BY INVESTIGATING IS SEEING (as in OE *sēon*, *gietan*)/ APPREHENDING IS TOUCHING (as in OE *frēdan*): These two senses are related to the domain of cognition. However, both the intellectual process and the results gathered are different. Vision allows us to detect and identify the nature and characteristics of external objects accurately and reliably; due to the lack of mediators in the perception and the

accurateness in the identification of what we see, the hypotheses that result from visual perception correspond much better to the real object (i.e., <correction-of-hypothesis<sub>yes</sub>>). Touch has a positive value for <directness> and for <identification>, but unlike vision, the cognitive process resulting from touch perception is subject to <closeness<sub>yes</sub>>, that is, the tactile stimulus must be in the vicinity of the perceiver. This necessity of closeness with the object perceived results in a higher degree of subjectivity, intimacy and emotion. In fact, the type of knowledge represented by originally touching verbs is related to the mental process of meditation, introspection and thinking.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the property <effect<sub>yes</sub>> inherent to touch perception implies that the type of knowledge extracted here has mental consequences for the perceiver (for example, an emotional reaction or a decision), whereas knowledge derived from vision does not necessarily affect the perceiver.

(37) Bd. I. 25:

*Hē heora þearfe forgeaf, oð þæt hē gesāwe hwæt hē him dón wolde.*  
He needed to forgive them, until he came to know what they  
wanted to do to him.

(38) Homl. Th. ii.232,25:

*Se lichama awent eorþan and anbīdap æristes, and on ðam fyrste  
nān þing ne gefrēt.*  
The body turns to earth and awaits the resurrection, and in that  
space feels nothing.

4. AFFECTING WITH AN EMOTION IS TOUCHING (as in OE *hrīnan*, *fēlan*): In this case, three properties are selected: <contact<sub>yes</sub>> and <closeness<sub>yes</sub>> on the one side (because it is a *conditio sine qua non* for the perceiver and the object perceived to be close to each other and to establish contact) and <effect<sub>yes</sub>> on the other (because the contact established between the perceiver and the object perceived has consequences, i.e., it affects his feelings or emotions).

33 Not surprisingly, the verb OE *þyncan* 'to think' (PrIde \**tong-/teng-* 'to think, feel'; recorded exclusively in Germanic languages) is etymologically related to L *tango* 'to touch' (PrIde \**tong-/teng-* 'to grip, seize, touch'; cf. OE *þaccian* 'to pat, clap, strike gently with the open hand or the like'); Díaz-Vera J.E., "Metaphors We Learnt By: Cultural Traditions and Metaphorical Patterns in the Old English Vocabulary of Knowledge", *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 55 (2007) 99–106.



- (39) Gen. 6,6:  
*Hē wæs gehrepod mid heortan sārnisse wiðinnan.*  
 He was touched by grief deep in his heart.

5. EXPERIENCING/SUFFERING IS SEEING (OE *sēon*)/AFFLICTING IS TOUCHING (OE *hrīnan*, *grētan*, *frēdan*): These verbs illustrate two different ways of experiencing something. OE *sēon*, to start with, is used to refer to the action of becoming aware (with the eyes) of the imminence of an event (such as, for examples, one's death):

- (40) Cd. 83:  
*Hē forþ gewāt metodsceaft seōn.*  
*He soon knew that is doom was already in sight.*

The touch verb OE *frēdan*, on the other hand, refers to the sympathetic reaction towards, for example, someone else's distress (DOE). Unlike the vision verb OE *sēon*, the touch verb *frēdan* indicates that the perceiver undergoes an emotional process as a consequence of contact with the object of perception:

- (41) ÆHom 27 89:  
*he cwæð þa mid wope, me þincð þæt ðu plegast and þu mine yrmðe naht ne gefredst.*  
*He said with cries, I think that you are playing and you are not being touched by my grief.*

6. INVESTIGATING/EXAMINING IS SEEING (OE *sēon*)/EXAMINING IN THE DARK IS TOUCHING (OE *grāpian*): Active touch is one of the most reliable methods that we have to explore our environment. As Sekuler and Blake put it, 'when the other senses conflict, touch is usually the ultimate arbiter'.<sup>34</sup> However, when exploring an object via the sense of touch, actions can change the object of perception. The extremities are not only exploratory sense organs, but also performatory motor organs.<sup>35</sup> We can not only explore things with our hands but also alter them.

- (42) Gen. 657:  
 *Ic on his gearwan geseō þæt hē is ærend-secg.*  
 From his clothing I saw he was a messenger.

34 Sekuler R. – Blake R., *Perception* (New York: 1994) 380.

35 Gibson J., *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: 1966) 99.

- (43) Blickl.Homl. 151,6:  
*Hie wurdon sōna ablinde and grāpodan mid heora handum on ða eorþan.*  
 They became blind at once and groped on the ground with their hands.

### Entrenchment of Old English Vision and Touch Metaphors

The list of properties described above is based on the physiology and on the psychology of the senses, which constrain universally our sensorial experiences. Consequently, these properties can account for metaphoric and metonymic correspondences between sensorial perception and other domains in human languages, independently of their linguistic family and historical period. In fact, such conceptual mappings as UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING or AFFECTING IS TOUCHING are pervasive not only in Old English, but also in Present-Day English, as well as in a wide variety of languages from different parts of the world, which makes them good candidates for universal metaphorical patterns.

Although perception metaphors are based on our sensorimotor experiences, recent studies on perception and cognition have demonstrated that, as we saw at the beginning of this presentation, not even the most basic metaphor UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS VISION can be considered universal, and numerous cultures around the world have opted for the conceptual mappings UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS HEARING or UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS SMELLING. Following Caballero and Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I will assume here that universal sensorimotor experience must 'pass through the complex and socially acquired particular beliefs, knowledge and worldview(s) intrinsic to one or several C/cultures and, in consequence, complemented with cultural information on the society under scrutiny'.<sup>36</sup>

For example, as has been seen before, speakers of English (and most other Indo-European languages) make recurrent use of the metaphor UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS VISION on the basis of the property <correction-of-hypothesis<sub>yes</sub>> (which, as indicated in Table 6, is common to vision, hearing and smelling). Broadly speaking, this means that, within these cultures, vision is considered the most accurate and correct sense for the formulation of hypotheses about the object of perception (in comparison with the real

36 Caballero R. – Ibarretxe-Antuñano I., "Ways of Perceiving" 274.

object). If, however, speakers of aboriginal Australian languages have instantiated the metaphor UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS HEARING and speakers of Jahai have opted for the mapping UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS SMELLING, we should assume that hearing and smelling, respectively, are considered relatively more accurate sources of information in these cultures.<sup>37</sup>

Based on these principles and on the information contained in the HTOED, I will now present a list of the Old English perception metaphors (vision and touch) that have survived into Present-Day-English. The results of this analysis are represented in Tables 8a (vision) and 8b (touching):

Two general conclusions can be extracted from Table 7a. To start with, there existed in Old English many vision metaphors not necessarily connected with cognition. This is the case of, for example, the mappings FORMING AN OPINION IS SEEING, FEELING AN EMOTION IS SEEING, CHOOSING IS SEEING and REGARDING WITH KINDLY FEELING IS SEEING, all of which are characterized by the 'subjective' sensation or reaction produced on the perceiver by the object of perception. As can be seen above, these metaphors have completely disappeared in Present-Day English, a linguistic variety that represents a culture where vision is considered the most objective of the senses.

Similarly, the mappings RESTRAINING IS SEEING, PROTECTING/DEFENDING IS SEEING, TAKING CARE THAT SOMETHING BE DONE IS SEEING and TAKING UP (SPACE/A PLACE) IS SEEING, all of which illustrate different forms of control or possession of the object of perception by the perceiver, have also been neglected by English speakers. The general metaphor CONTROLLING IS SEEING, which occupied a predominant position in Old English, in fact takes a secondary position in Present-Day English, where only Old English cognition-related metaphors and, especially, mappings related to the general UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS VISION, have been preserved by Present-Day English speakers.

Interestingly, in spite of the strong tendency to maintain (and even develop further) the connection between vision and understanding/knowing throughout the history of the English language, it should be noted here that this tendency applies only to the verb OE *sēon*, whereas the verb OE *ongietan* lost its connection both with 'vision' (late Old English) and with 'understanding/cognition' (1250). As Waugh indicates in his study of the uses of OE *ongietan* in *Beowulf*, this verb represented a type of meta-sensuous ability that permitted the Germanic hero to perceive visual and auditory stimuli from a very long

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37 Caballero R. – Ibarretxe-Antuñano I., "Ways of Perceiving" 269.

TABLE 7A *Present-Day English reflexes of Old English 'vision' metaphors and metonymies*

Mapping	OE	PDE
KEEPING GUARD OVER SOMETHING IS SEEING	✓	<i>watch</i>
TAKING CARE THAT SOMETHING BE DONE IS SEEING	✓	–
TAKING NOTICE OF SOMETHING IS SEEING	✓	<i>watch</i>
PAYING ATTENTION TO SOMETHING IS SEEING	✓	<i>look</i>
INVESTIGATING/EXAMINING IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
CALLING FOR ATTENTION IS SEEING	✓	<i>look</i>
UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
FINDING OUT BY INVESTIGATION IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
RECOGNIZING/ACKNOWLEDGING IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
RETAINING/SEIZING IS SEEING	✓	–
OBSERVING AN AGREEMENT IS SEEING	✓	<i>observe</i>
CARRYING OUT A PROMISE/LAW IS SEEING	✓	<i>observe</i>
TAKING UP (SPACE/A PLACE) IS SEEING	✓	–
BEING EFFICACIOUS IS SEEING	✓	–
PROTECTING/DEFENDING IS SEEING	✓	–
BEING VIGILANT/ON ONE'S GUARD IS SEEING	✓	<i>watch</i>
MEANING IS SEEING	✓	–
RESTRAINING IS SEEING	✓	–
FORMING/HOLDING AN OPINION IS SEEING	✓	–
HEARING IS SEEING	✓	–
FEELING AN EMOTION IS SEEING	✓	–
HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS SEEING	✓	–
IMAGINING/VISUALIZING IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
BEING AWARE IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
VISITING IS SEEING	✓	<i>see</i>
EXPERIENCING/SUFFERING IS SEEING	✓	(> <i>taste</i> )
CONSIDERING/DELIBERATING IS SEEING	✓	<i>contemplate</i>
FORESEEING IS SEEING	✓	<i>foresee</i>
MAKING A DECREE IS SEEING	✓	–
CHOOSING IS SEEING	✓	–
REGARDING WITH KINDLY FEELINGS IS SEEING	✓	–

TABLE 7B *Present-Day English reflexes of Old English 'touch' metaphors and metonymies*

Mapping	OE	PDE
DAMAGING/ATTACKING IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>touch</i>
AFFECTING WITH EMOTION IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>touch</i>
REACHING IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>touch</i>
AFFLICTING IS TOUCHING	✓	–
HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS TOUCHING	✓	–
DEALING WITH IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>handle</i>
TREATING (AS A DOCTOR) IS TOUCHING	✓	–
GREETING/SALUTING IS TOUCHING	✓	–
ADDRESSING RESPECTFULLY IS TOUCHING	✓	–
HOLDING A DISCUSSION IS TOUCHING	✓	–
SPEAKING TO SOMEBODY IS TOUCHING	✓	–
DENYING AN ACCUSATION IS TOUCHING	✓	–
BEING ANNOYED/VEXED IS BEING TOUCHED	✓	–
WEEPING IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>strike</i> (Scots <i>greet</i> )
PLAYING (AN INSTRUMENT) IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>touch, finger</i>
EXAMINING (IN THE DARK) IS TOUCHING	✓	<i>handle</i>
SEARCHING (IN THE DARK) IS TOUCHING	✓	–
ACTING BLINDLY/STUPIDLY IS TOUCHING	✓	–
WRITING ABOUT IS TOUCHING	✓	–
MENTIONING IS TOUCHING	✓	–
BLAMING IS TOUCHING	✓	–
APPREHENDING IS TOUCHING	✓	–

distance (property <closeness<sub>no</sub>> in both senses).<sup>38</sup> In the poem, Beowulf can not only see far away objects (such as the cliffs of Geatland), but also distant messages and people's virtues, extending the semantic scope of the verb OE *ongitan* into the realm of abstract perception.

As for 'touching' metaphors, Table 7b indicates that 15 (out of 26) mappings used by Old English speakers have fallen into disuse in Present-Day English, weakening the correspondence between touch and cognition. This is

38 Waugh R., "Ongitan and the Possibility of Oral Seeing in *Beowulf*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53, 3 (2011) 338–351.

especially true in the case of mappings related to the general UNDERSTANDING/KNOWING IS TOUCHING metaphor, as well as in the case of mappings related to 'interpersonal relations' (including 'speaking', 'greeting' and 'having sexual intercourse') and 'dealing with a topic'. Finally, it is interesting to see that whereas the mapping AFFECTING WITH EMOTION IS TOUCHING has survived into Present-Day English, the more specific mappings for 'negative emotions' have disappeared. Touching, in fact, has become a pervasive source for general emotion metaphors, both positive and negative.

Both tendencies are indicative of a growing pervasiveness of the UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE IS VISION metaphor in the history of the English language, which implies a growing degree of specialization of vision vocabulary to refer metaphorically to knowledge, in detriment of the other senses. The increasing relevance of vision as a source of knowledge is to be related, among others, to a series of cultural changes, such as the spread of literacy in Western Europe and the slow but constant transition from an oral culture to a literate one. At the same time, we have a progressive generalization of the conceptual mapping AFFECTING IS TOUCHING, with its emphasis on the subjective and emotional results of tactile perception.

The results of this study of the Old English vocabulary for sight and touch invite further research to clarify several issues. To start with, a fine-grained analysis of the distribution of these metaphors in different historical sub-periods within the history of Old English could be used to determine the relative chronology of the process of semantic extension of vision and touch verbs towards the domains of knowledge and emotions, respectively.<sup>39</sup> In a similar fashion, it would be necessary to try to define the distribution of these mappings across the different genres or textual types represented in the corpus, in order to try to reconstruct how these semantic innovations actually expanded across the language.<sup>40</sup> Finally, research on the vocabulary for the other three senses, hearing, smell and taste, and on their role as source domains in metaphorical correspondences (not only in Old English but also in the other stages in the history of the English language) is necessary for a better understanding of the dynamic connections between the senses and cognition and, ultimately, between the body and the mind.

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39 The standard sub-division of a set of Anglo-Saxon texts into three sub-periods (pre-850, 850–950 and 950–1050) proposed by the compilers of the Helsinki Corpus seems a feasible starting point for the chronological classification of the corpus used here. See Kytö M., *Manual to the Diachronic Part of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Coding Conventions and List of Source Texts* (Helsinki: 1996).

40 Again, the classifications proposed by the Helsinki Corpus group could be used here; see Kytö, *Manual*.

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## PART 2

### *Vision and Its Distortion*





# Bleary Eyes: Middle English Constructions of Visual Disabilities

Beatrix Busse and Annette Kern-Stähler

## Introduction

British Library MS Harley 2378, a composite miscellany of culinary, medical and alchemical recipes, contains a collection of pharmacological remedies which was possibly written in the mid-thirteenth century by the anonymous physician traditionally called Nicolaus Salernitanus. ‘For a man that hath *lost his syght alto-gedere*’, this *Antidotarium* recommends: ‘Take aloe and opium, of eyther I-liche myche, and stampe hem and medle it with wommanes mylke that norischit a knaue child; anoynte ther-with his eyne *and he schal seen*’.<sup>1</sup> This remedy establishes a clear distinction between the patient’s eye condition before treatment and after, juxtaposing total blindness and sightedness. The dichotomy between the presence and absence of sight is also common in late medieval narratives centring on the loss, or on the retrieval, of sight. Thus, medieval accounts of healing miracles, which have been shown to follow the model set by Christ’s miracles in the gospels,<sup>2</sup> present the healing of the blind as a sudden transformation from a state of total blindness to one of sight.<sup>3</sup> A number of these medieval miracle healings are preceded by a moralising story in which the blindness of the person later to be cured is inflicted as a punishment for his or her transgressive behaviour. Like the restoration of sight,

1 British Library MS Harley 2378, fol. 69. Cited in Henslow G., *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century: Together with a List of Plants Recorded in Contemporary Writings, with Their Identifications* (London: 1899) 94, our emphasis.

2 For Christ healing the blind see e.g. Mark 10:46–52; Matt 9: 27–31; John 9. See further Metzler I., *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (Abingdon: 2006) 134–136 and Barasch M., *Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York: 2001) 47–56.

3 See for example the healing miracles performed by St Ihtamar of Rochester and St William of Norwich: Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, Appendix, I.ii; M.i.16; W.ix.xi and xvii, and by St Foy (Faith) and St Dunstan: Wheatley E., *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: 2010) 172–175 and (for St Foy) Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, App. F.

the onset of blindness is instantaneous in these miracle narratives: the sinner is struck blind.<sup>4</sup> In secular writings, too, we find instances of sudden blinding: as punishment exacted by divine hand, such as the blinding of the knight in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'<sup>5</sup> and in Gower's version of the story in the *Confessio Amantis*,<sup>6</sup> or through the breath of the fairy queen Tryamour, who in Thomas Chestre's romance *Sir Launfal* blows Guinevere's eyes out.<sup>7</sup>

Yet contrary to what descriptions such as these may suggest, neither blindness nor sightedness were perceived as absolute categories in the Middle Ages. There was, in fact, an awareness of various degrees of visual impairment, covering a wide spectrum between the two states of blindness and sight. Medieval texts represent the loss, and recovery, of sight not only as a sudden occurrence but also as a gradual process. Indeed, if we take a closer look at the remedy quoted at the beginning of our article, the phrase 'a man hath lost his sight alto-gedere' implies the awareness that there is such a thing as a partial loss of eyesight. The collocation of the verb *lose* with the summative adverb *altogether* indicates a gradual loss and, hence, a stage in-between complete blindness and sightedness. In John Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things* (1398), a translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' popular encyclopaedia *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, it is the use of the collocation *dim the sight* which implies that turning blind is a gradual process of becoming and that there is a continuum between the state of sightedness and that of blindness: '[vn]ord[i]nat diete and [...] contynuel dronkenes [...] dymmeþ þe sigt' ['excessive diet and continuous drunkenness dim the sight'].<sup>8</sup> In this case, too, blindness is linked with what appears to be sinful excess, but an excess which in itself is progressive and drawn-out and, as such, may also explain the corresponding dynamic nature of the process of

4 Examples are given in Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 146–148 and in Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 157–172.

5 Chaucer Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales* II.666–672. All quotations from the *Canterbury Tales* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: 1988).

6 Gower John, *Confessio Amantis* II.587–1612, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, extra series 81 (London – New York – Toronto: 1900; reprint, London – New York – Toronto: 1979) vol. 1, 154.

7 Tryamour 'blew on her [Guinevere] swych a breth / That never eft might sche se'. Chestre Thomas, "Sir Launfal", ll. 1006–1007, in *Of Love and Chivalry: An Anthology of Middle English Romance*, ed. J. Fellows (London: 1993) 199–229, 228. The blinding of the Queen has been read as an attempt to punish her sexual transgression. See Vandeventer Pearman T., *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature* (New York: 2010) 84–95; Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 149–154.

8 Trevisa John, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M.C. Seymour, 3 vols. (Oxford: 1975–1988) 1, 31.

becoming blind as a product of, or at least implicitly a punishment for, the sin of gluttony. What is significant, however, is that the loss of sight – whatever the medical reason – is described here as a process. Verbs like *dim* neither precisely mention the extent to which sight is weakened, nor do they represent technical terms expressing that particular state. And yet, the use of collocations like *dim the sight* is one of a number of linguistic strategies used to describe the gradual process of the weakening of sight. It is these strategies that we are interested in this essay. We will probe the linguistic phrases, constructions and concepts used to convey the wide range of descriptions of conditions and experiences situated in-between sightedness and blindness. These have so far been neglected in historical linguistic investigations of past stages of the English language in general and of medical texts from the past in particular.<sup>9</sup>

Our research is situated in the field of Disability Studies, an interdisciplinary area of enquiry which conceptualises disability not as a physical condition but as a social and cultural construction and which focuses its analysis on the question of ‘how disability is imagined’.<sup>10</sup> Disability Studies usefully distinguishes between impairment and disability: ‘Impairment’ is used to denote a bodily difference, either congenital or acquired in later life. It is regarded as a biological condition which is independent of any social and cultural values assigned to it. In contrast, ‘disability’ is conceptualised not as an ontological fact but as a social and cultural construction and thus as contingent upon social and historical particularities.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between impairment and disability has recently been rightfully questioned by scholars who argue that the focus on the construction of disabilities belittles the physical condition of the impaired.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, these terminological choices prove useful for our project as they allow us to distinguish between visual impairment as a bodily condition and the discursive construction of disabled vision.

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9 While there has been an increased interest among historical linguists in the intersection of language and medicine (see e.g. Taavitsainen I. – Pahta P. [eds.], *Medical Writing in Early Modern English* [Cambridge: 2011]; Taavitsainen I., “Historical Discourse Analysis: Scientific Language and Changing Thought-Styles”, in Fanego T. – Méndez-Naya B. – Seoane E. [eds.], *Sounds, Words, Text and Change: Selected Papers from 11 ICEHL, Santiago de Compostela, 7–11 September 2000* [Amsterdam: 2002] 201–226), linguistic constructions of sight and blindness have remained unexplored.

10 Garland-Thomson R., “The Beauty and the Freak”, in Cruchfield S. – Epstein M. (eds.), *Points of Contact: Disability, Art, and Culture* (Ann Arbor: 2000) 181–196, 181.

11 Barnes C. et al., *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: 1999) 7.

12 Eyler J.R., “Introduction: Building Boundaries, Building Bridges”, *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (Farnham: 2010) 1–9, 8.

Scholars working in the field of Disability Studies have frequently pointed out that studies on the histories of disabilities are underrepresented,<sup>13</sup> with the medieval period in particular having remained largely unexplored.<sup>14</sup> What is also missing, we argue, are approaches to disabilities which include the discipline of linguistics. While there is agreement among Disability Studies scholars that studies on blindness will benefit strongly from an interdisciplinary approach,<sup>15</sup> projects on the histories of disabilities have so far not included the field of historical linguistics. This is the more surprising as Disability Studies scholars are very much aware of the fact that linguistic choices are constitutive in assigning and reassigning meaning to impairment<sup>16</sup> and profess to be interested in the ‘terminology employed to describe impaired people’.<sup>17</sup> The constructive power of language is one function of language which can be investigated with the help of the methodologies of historical corpus linguistics, pragmatics and historical stylistics.<sup>18</sup> Hence, it would seem crucial to include these in any interdisciplinary project on the history of disabilities.

### Methods and Data

In order to analyse how visual disabilities are construed in Middle English texts, we suggest a multidimensional and multifunctional triangulation of methods from historical corpus linguistics, pragmatics and historical stylistics.<sup>19</sup> At the core of these methodologies are systematic, retrievable and

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- 13 Longmore P.K. – Umiansky L., “Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream”, in Longmore P.K. – Umiansky L. (eds.), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York – London: 2001) 1–29, 15.
  - 14 Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 12–20.
  - 15 Klein A., “Wie betreibt man Disability History? Methoden in Bewegung”, in Bösl E. et al. (eds.), *Disability History: Konstruktionen von Behinderung in der Geschichte: Eine Einführung* (Bielefeld: 2010) 45–63, 56.
  - 16 See Wilson J.C. – Lewiecki-Wilson C., “Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture”, in Wilson J.C. – Lewiecki-Wilson C. (eds.), *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture* (Carbondale – Edwardsville: 2001) 1–24, 3.
  - 17 Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 3–5.
  - 18 Jucker A.H. – Taavitsainen I., “Trends and Developments in Historical Pragmatics”, in Jucker A.H. – Taavitsainen I. (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Pragmatics* (Berlin: 2010) 3–30; Busse B., “Recent Trends in New Historical Stylistics”, in McIntyre D. – Busse B. (eds.), *Language and Style* (London: 2010) 32–54; Busse B., “(New) Historical Stylistics”, in Burke M. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (London 2014) 101–117.
  - 19 For historical corpus linguistics and pragmatics, see Jucker – Taavitsainen, “Trends and Developments in Historical Pragmatics”; for historical stylistics, see Busse, “Recent Trends in New Historical Stylistics” and Busse, “(New) Historical Stylistics”.

detailed synchronic and diachronic analyses of the creation of linguistic patterns as meaningful and stylistic units and of their linguistic functions. Our article identifies in a limited corpus of paradigmatic Middle English texts a set of linguistic expressions that are used to describe visual impairments. Our approach is therefore inherently qualitative in nature. In a historical pragmatic framework, it constitutes both a function-to-form and a form-to-function mapping.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, it may potentially form the basis also for assessing reliable quantitative results of repetitive linguistic patterns relating to vision, blindness and the in-between in follow-up studies.

Making use of wide-ranging historical linguistic data increasingly available in digitised form, it will be possible in such follow-up studies to chart the evolution of specific linguistic patterns and stylistic features in unprecedented detail. Contemporary historical stylistics and historical corpus pragmatics allow for a universal 'diachronic presence' in any text. The concepts of evolving grammars or mobile and dynamic discourse patterns embrace style and linguistic patterning as both a qualitative and quantitative unit – as one that is marked by diversity and internal variation and that may be described in terms of dynamic function-to-form and form-to-function mappings. These mappings rely neither solely on an exaggerated empirical focus nor on simple intuition-based qualitative research. Computer-assisted text analysis – as practised in historical corpus linguistic and historical stylistic methodologies – further helps to quantitatively identify linguistic conventions and linguistic patterns of usage; it draws on statistical tests to interrogate the representativeness of the texts under investigation and of the language choices they incorporate. The analyses of larger amounts of historical corpus data may thus provide us with a norm against which the results of such a text analysis can be qualitatively measured. In this way it will be possible to establish the discursive practices of a given genre, intra- and intertextual norms, the stylistic realisation of a particular linguistic function in a text and in keywords.

Before assessing linguistic expressions used to describe visual impairments, it is necessary to identify those terms in a historically informed way and by

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20 Jacobs A. – Jucker A.H., "The Historical Perspective in Pragmatics", in Jucker A.H. (ed.), *Historical Pragmatics: Pragmatic Development in the History of English*, Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 35 (Amsterdam: 1995) 3–36. Diachronic investigations of pragmatic linguistic phenomena, such as speech acts or discourse markers, analyse the pragmatic functions of a particular linguistic form. This is a form-to-function mapping. A function-to-form analysis uses a particular function as its starting point, e.g. linguistic politeness phenomena or the speech act of apology, and tries to investigate how that particular function is realised linguistically, i.e. which linguistic form expresses a particular pragmatic function.

means of top-down and bottom-up methodological procedures. One of our methodological procedures is lexicographical in design, as it draws on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (HTOED).<sup>21</sup> Both the HTOED's printed and electronic versions are essential and require complementary use. The HTOED arranges all lexical entries of the OED hierarchically into semantic categories on the basis of historical principles. It is further possible to search not only for particular forms and how they are semantically categorised, but also for particular semantic categories and the sets of lexemes of which they were comprised in a diachronic perspective. Accordingly, we focused on lexical representations of the perceived healthy state of sight and vision and the respective organs. At the same time, we checked the HTOED for semantic categories like 'unhealthy states' or 'disorders of the eye', which are represented in the HTOED as follows:

the external world >> the living world >> health >> ill health >> a disease  
>> disorders of eye >> relating to eye disorders >> bleary  
bleared (1362)  
bleary (1393)  
blear (1398)

Our lexicographical searches of expressions referring to vision and blindness result in the following potential set of lexical forms:

adj.: *beetle-blind*, *bison*, *bleary*, *blind*, *born-blind*, *clear-eyed*, *dark*, *dazzled*, *dim*, *faded*, *foggy*, *hazy*, *lynx*, *misty*, *mistful*, *owlish* [with reference to eyes that do not tolerate too much light], *purbblind* ['having impaired vision'], *sightless*; n.: *blink*, *eye*, *eyesight*, *glare*, *gleam*, *i-sight* [eye-sight], *sene*, *seeing*, *sightfulness*, *speculation* ['the faculty of seeing'], *stare*, *vision*, *visive power*, *wink*; vb.: *see*, *thorough-see*, *bihowe* ['to view, see'], *ofsee* ['to see, perceive'], *behold*, *bihede*, *heed*, *wite* ['to see, observe'], *conceive*, *eye*, *view*.<sup>22</sup>

21 Simpson J. (ed.), *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: 2014); Kay C. – Roberts J. – Samuels M. – Wotherspoon I. (eds.), *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: 2009).

22 This list comprises adjectives, nouns, and verbs which the HTOED additionally lists under 'Vision' and 'Poor vision' and 'Relating to eye disorders' with first dates of occurrence in the OED lying between c900 and c1600. In our corpus searches we took into consideration the ME spelling variants and word forms as well as the fact that some of these lexemes may appear as nouns and adjectives or as nouns and verbs.



This set, retrieved from our systematic investigations in the HTOED, goes beyond the obvious lemmata like *blind*, *sight*, *see* or *eye*. Not only does it reveal that Middle English had an elaborate vocabulary to refer to visual impairments but it also shows that there was a number of lexical items to describe various degrees of visual impairment in-between the two states of sightedness and blindness, such as *purblind* and *mistful*. Several of these imply the notion of disability. Disability, as Irina Metzler reminds us, 'is very much a matter of perception, both by others and by the individual concerned'.<sup>23</sup> Terms like *bleary*, *dim*, *hazy* and *misty*, for example, imply a disabled state of seeing (the object of vision is unclear) but could also refer to the visually impaired from the perspective of others (the visually impaired person is marked as disabled by his bleary, misty eyes).

Increasing access to digitised sources has initiated the ongoing review of lemma-dating remarks in the OED.<sup>24</sup> This would suggest that some forms labelled early modern may in fact already have been in use in the late medieval period but are not yet recorded as such in the OED/HTOED. For this reason, we have tentatively also included lexemes in our list of search terms that are dated to the sixteenth century in the HTOED to allow for potential cross-overs.

Having established our set of search terms, we used this for a corpus-assisted investigation. This means that we ran these terms (considering also their Middle English spelling variants and word forms) through a selected language corpus, i.e. electronically-stored language files containing representative text samples of specific historical periods (the medieval and the early modern periods) and a specific genre (medical writing) in order to systematically assess, analyse and interpret lexical patterns of usage referring to the particular concept under investigation (blindness, sightedness and stages in-between) on the basis of wide-ranging historical data. Electronically-stored language corpora can be searched with the help of software tools like WordSmith in order to create concordances and assist with quantitative keyword analyses.<sup>25</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we used the *Corpus of Early English Medical Writing*

<sup>23</sup> Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 7.

<sup>24</sup> The OED has welcomed contributions from the academic and general public on the history of the English vocabulary since its first publication more than 150 years ago. For the same purpose, the OED Online has recently launched a new website called "The OED Appeals" (<http://public.oed.com/the-oed-appeals/>), where the OED Online users are asked for help in finding additional evidence on the recorded history of an English word or phrase, or any other aspect of it. Finding evidence for antedating or postdating, i.e. an earlier or later record for a word or phrase, either in the OED quotations or in external sources has always been part of these appeals.

<sup>25</sup> Scott M., *WordSmith Tools Version 6* (Liverpool: 2012).

(CEEM) (1375–1800), which currently consists of two sub-corpora: *Middle English Medical Texts* (MEMT) (1375–1500) and *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (EMEMT) (1500–1700).<sup>26</sup> This corpus so far appears to have gone unnoticed among historians of Disability Studies and has not yet been used for linguistic investigations of the five senses. MEMT is a small machine-readable corpus of 86 text excerpts (ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 words) consisting of 500,000 words in total.<sup>27</sup> Even though it is limited in size, MEMT is a useful electronic (re)source for our chosen field of enquiry in terms of generic, and chronological coverage from 1375 to 1500. Containing excerpts from surgical and pharmaceutical texts, ophthalmic treatises, encyclopaedic texts and folk remedies, and following the criteria of historical corpus-linguistics, it systematically accounts for medieval traditions of and developments in medical writing on the basis of a wide range of texts.

It is nevertheless important to emphasise that MEMT includes only selected passages from these texts. In the long run, it will be necessary to complement our MEMT search with the scrutiny of the complete texts in order to arrive at a more comprehensive set of linguistic constructions of visual disabilities. Texts that may be of special interest are remedy books, which offer prescriptions for the treatment of various medical conditions, such as the one quoted at the beginning of our article, and the Middle English translation of a book of remedies by the Franciscan friar John de Rupescissa (d. 1362).<sup>28</sup> Of significance, too, are the more narrowly defined medical sources collected in MEMT, i.e. those medical (often surgical) texts written by university-educated health professionals for the instruction of other medical professionals, such as the Middle English translations of the fourteenth-century *Chirurgia Magna* by

26 Taavitsainen I. – Pahta P. – Mäkinen M., *Corpus of Early English Medical Writing 1375–1800* (Helsinki: 1995–); Taavitsainen I. – Pahta P. – Mäkinen M., *Middle English Medical Texts* (Amsterdam: 2005); Taavitsainen I. – Pahta P. – Mäkinen M., *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (Amsterdam: 2010).

27 Corpora of contemporary English are much larger in terms of the number of words they contain. The British National Corpus (BNC, <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>), for instance, currently consist of 100 and 450 million words, respectively.

28 Rupescissa John of, *The Consideration of Quintessence: An Edition of a Middle English Translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de Consideratione de Quintae Essentiae Omnium Rerum with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, ed. M.A. Halversen, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan: 1998). (MEMT: Rupescissa, *Remedies*, c1450.) See further DeVun L., *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupescissa in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: 2009).

the French physician Guy de Chauliac and the fifteenth-century Middle English adaptations of the pharmaceutical writings of the English physician Gilbertus Anglicus, the *Compendium Medicinae* (c. 1230).<sup>29</sup> Ophthalmic treatises are obviously also of particular relevance: the Middle English translation of Benvenutus Grassus' late thirteenth-century treatise *De Probatissima Arte Oculorum* (*On the Well-Proven Art of the Eye*)<sup>30</sup> was one of the most widely used medical texts between the late fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and circulated in a number of vernacular translations, with three manuscripts surviving from fifteenth-century England.<sup>31</sup> In the late medieval period, much of the scholarly knowledge about medicine and, significantly, also about the science of optics (*perspectiva*), which had become one of the most prominent fields of enquiry in the late Middle Ages,<sup>32</sup> was disseminated to a wider audience in the

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- 29 E.g. Chauliac Guy de, *The Middle English Translation of Guy de Chauliac's Anatomy, With Guy's Essay on the History of Medicine*, ed. B. Wallner, Lunds Universitets Årsskrift, N.F., Avd. 1, vol. 56, no. 5 (Lund: 1964); Chauliac Guy de, *An Interpolated Middle English Version of the Anatomy of Guy de Chauliac*, part 1: *Text*, ed. B. Wallner, Skrifter utgivna av Vetenskaps-societen i Lund 87 (Lund: 1995); Chauliac Guy de, *The Middle English Translation of Guy de Chauliac's Treatise on Ulcers*, part 1: *Text. Book IV of the Great Surgery*, ed. B. Wallner, Acta Universitatis Lundensis, Sectio 1, Theologica Juridica Humaniora 39 (Stockholm: 1982); Anglicus Gilbertus, *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, ed. F.M. Getz (Madison: 1991).
- 30 Grassus Benvenutus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye: A Critical Edition of the Middle English Translation of His De Probatissima Arte Oculorum*, ed. L.M. Eldredge (East Lansing: 1996). The three surviving fifteenth-century versions and a sixteenth-century version of the treatise have recently been made available in a synoptic edition: Miranda-García A. – González Fernández-Corugedo S. (eds.), *Benvenutus Grassus' On the Well-Proven Art of the Eye: Practica Oculorum & De Probatissima Arte Oculorum: Synoptic Edition and Philological Studies* (Bern et al.: 2011).
- 31 González Fernández-Corugedo S., "Prologue", in Miranda-García – González Fernández-Corugedo (eds.), *Benvenutus Grassus' On the Well-Proven Art of the Eye* 11–18, 11; Calle Martín J., "Through the Looking Glass: The Palaeography of Benvenutus Grassus' English Vernacular Tradition", in Miranda-García – González Fernández-Corugedo (eds.), *Benvenutus Grassus' On the Well-Proven Art of the Eye* 35–54, 36–37. The Latin manuscripts are discussed by Elredge L.M., "The Latin Manuscripts of Benvenutus Grassus' Treatise on Diseases and Injuries to the Eye", in Miranda-García – González Fernández-Corugedo (eds.), *Benvenutus Grassus' On the Well-Proven Art of the Eye* 19–33.
- 32 Brown P., *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* (Frankfurt a.M.: 2007) 41–74; Lindberg D.C., *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago History of Science & Medicine (Chicago – London: 1996) 144.

form of encyclopaedias, such as Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* (c. 1244–1260), which survives in more than fifty copies but which is not included in MEMT.<sup>33</sup> Future investigations of full texts should therefore also pay attention to these channels of transmission. The most popular Middle English encyclopaedic work represented in MEMT, John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, contains several passages on sight and on eye disorders and their cure, and accordingly is of particular relevance to our enquiry into Middle English constructions of visual disabilities.<sup>34</sup> Another vernacular encyclopaedic work to take into account is the Middle English adaptation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* (*The Secret of Secrets*), a treatise which by the early fourteenth century enjoyed enormous popularity in Western Europe.<sup>35</sup> The search of the selected excerpts from texts included in MEMT already revealed a number of lexemes in addition to the ones retrieved from the HTOED, such as 'dymme and derke', where *dark* is coordinated with *dim* to signify a weakening of sight in Grassus; and 'feble' (feeble), 'combred' (hampered) vision, and sight that is 'noȝt scharp' in Trevisa; being 'blere-yȝed' (bleary-eyed) in Gilbertus Anglicus; 'dazovnesse of eyen' (dimness of eyes) in Rupescissa, or 'corruption of sight' in the *Secret of Secrets*. It seems more than likely that this list of lexemes may need to be expanded once additional full texts are taken into consideration.

Significantly, any study on linguistic constructions of visual disabilities needs to consider also other types of texts, which are not represented in MEMT: in the late medieval period, medical and optical material infused religious and secular literature of various genres. These texts not only helped to disseminate the relevant terminology but also developed its creative use. In section 4 of this article, we will be concerned with the dissemination of visual

33 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 78–109; García-Ballester L., "Introduction: Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death", in García-Ballester L. – French R. – Arrizabalaga J. – Cunningham A. (eds.), *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death* (Cambridge: 1994) 1–29, 5. For the circulation of encyclopaedic texts in medieval England see further Twomey M.W., "Towards a Reception History of Western Medieval Encyclopaedias in England before 1500", in Binkley P. (ed.), *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second Comers Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996* (Leiden: 1997) 329–362.

34 Esp. book 3, chapter 17: "De Sensu Visus". Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 108–113.

35 Manẖalaoui M.A., *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions* (Oxford: 1977) vol. 1: *Text*. (MEMT: *Secrete of Secrete*s, c1500 [c1450]). On the translations and transmission of this tenth-century Arabic treatise and its enormous popularity in medieval western Europe see further Eamon W., *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: 1994) 38–58.

material through, and linguistic constructions of, visual disabilities in literary texts, focusing on Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale".

### Linguistic Constructions of Partial Vision and Blindness in MEMT

Our corpus analysis of MEMT, based on the list of terms retrieved from our HTOED searches, reveals that only 206 word tokens in MEMT are lexical references to vision and visual impairments. This amounts to 0.1%. Direct reference to blindness in a non-metaphorical sense is particularly rare. It occurs only eight times, both predicatively and attributively (Grassus' treatise for example refers to those who are 'blynde borne').<sup>36</sup> The noun *blindness* has only one occurrence in texts from the MEMT corpus, in a fourteenth-century treatise of popular medicine connected to Peter de Barulo and preserved in a manuscript dating from around 1475. In this text, the noun *blindness* collocates with the participle *growing*, which expresses blindness as a process of becoming: 'And yt [the letting of blood] schall put a weye ye fevyr, ye gowte, ye ffallyng evyll, and *all manere of growyng of blyndnesse*'.<sup>37</sup>

The low number of lexical references to visual impairments in MEMT may have a number of reasons. Some of the terms on the HTOED list may already have been extremely marginal in Middle English (such as *bihowe*, which has only one quote in the OED, an indication that it occurs only rarely in Middle English texts), others may not have been used in medical texts and therefore do not feature in MEMT: the term *ofsee*, for example, while not occurring in MEMT, is used in a number of romances in the late medieval period (see OED s.v. *ofsee*). Yet another reason may be related to our decision to include in our list of HTOED search terms (as margin of safety) a number of words which, according to the OED, do not occur before the early modern period (e.g. *owlsh*, OED first occurrence 1594).

Significantly, our analysis has revealed that the experience of visual impairment is construed by a number of patterned repetitive lexico-grammatical

36 MEMT: Grassus Benvenutus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye*, c1475–1499. Grassus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye* 49–92, our emphasis. Citations marked by MEMT are taken from the MEMT corpus (Taavitsainen – Pahta – Mäkinen, *Middle English Medical Texts*). Dates refer to the dating of manuscripts used in MEMT.

37 MEMT, *The Wyse Boke of Maystyr Peers of Salerne*, c1475, our emphasis. For an edition of the complete text: Heffernan C.F., "The Wyse Boke of Maystyr Peers of Salerne: Edition and Study of a Fourteenth-Century Treatise of Popular Medicine", *Manuscripta* 37 (1993) 307–317.

constructions rather than single technical terms: among them the specific realisations of noun phrases, the use of negation and comparison and particular verbal process types as well as semantic domains on some of which we will now focus in more detail.

In the medieval understanding, some eye diseases were caused by cataracts, others by injuries affecting the eye.<sup>38</sup> The majority of eye diseases, however, were (like all other illnesses) understood as a state of humoural imbalance. Therapy accordingly consisted in the restoration of balance.<sup>39</sup> Carol Everest has shown that medieval medical texts associate the 'loss of sight with excessive sexual indulgence and with a perilous physiological decline'.<sup>40</sup> The aging body is increasingly depleted of its natural warmth and moisture, a condition severely enhanced by sexual excess. After all, according to medieval physiology, 'the eyes, the brain, and the genital secretions are closely connected'.<sup>41</sup> This explains why in many cases the semantic field used to describe imperfect vision overlaps with that of humoural theory.

Not to be confused with the four Galenic humours, 'humour' was also used in descriptions of the anatomy of the eye. The eyes were thought to be made up of seven membranes (tunics), four colours and three viscous liquids, the so-called 'humours'. It was in the middle of these humours, the crystalline (today lens), that vision was thought to be formed, that colours, shapes and figures were supposed to be apprehended.<sup>42</sup> The crystalline humour was understood to be clear and bright, so that, as Woolgar puts it, 'it might change to different colours and take their likeness without any interference'.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the semantic domains of clarity and brightness, and its antonymic counterparts blariness and darkness are often used to refer to healthy and impaired sight in medieval medical texts. At the grammatical interface these semantic domains correlate with specific realisations of noun phrases, the use of negation and comparison, and particular verbal process types. They also go along with descriptions of symptoms, healing and suffering as well as descriptions

38 Eldredge, "Introduction", in Grassus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye* 8–10.

39 See further York W.H., *Health and Wellness in Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Santa Barbara: 2012) 8; Singer J., *Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry* (Cambridge: 2011) 80.

40 Everest C., "Sight and Sexual Performance in the *Merchant's Tale*", in Beidler P.G. (ed.), *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Cryseide* (Woodbridge: 1998) 91–103, 92.

41 Everest, "Sight and Sexual Performance in the *Merchant's Tale*" 96.

42 Woolgar C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: 2006) 147 and Eldredge, "Introduction" 8–9.

43 Woolgar, *The Senses* 147.



of causes like excessive sex, choler, blood, physical constitution, grief, age, and imbalance of the humours in general.<sup>44</sup>

Adjectives like *clear*, *pure*, *strong* and *sharp* refer to states of 'perfection', while *feeble*, *dim* and *weak* antonymically express an 'imperfect' or impaired state of vision. Correspondingly, verbs like *clear*, *clarify*, *purge* and *quicken* occur to describe a process of progressive healing. The verbs *make*, *wax*, *lessen* and *dim* create the opposite effect or are used for a process-like construal of a state in-between vision and blindness. The Middle English translation of Benvenutus Grassus's ophthalmic treatise *De Probatissima Arte Oculorum*, for example, describes the symptoms of ophthalmia, or what Grassus prefers to call 'torturam tenebrosam', i.e. the inflammation of the eyes, as a condition that 'makyth the eye dymme and derke'. Conversely, he speaks of the 'clearing' of sight as the effect of successful eye treatment.<sup>45</sup> John Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things* gives expression to the stages in-between vision and blindness under certain conditions, for example when one is mentally occupied with other things, one's sight is 'lasse parfite',<sup>46</sup> and when an object moves too quickly, one's sight is 'combred' (hampered).<sup>47</sup>

Nominal groups are also employed to describe a state between vision and blindness. Abstract nominal groups where nouns are used to generalise a weakness of sight can be found in the Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's book of remedies.<sup>48</sup> Constructions like 'impedimentz of the sighte' show that the sense of sight can be temporarily or partially obstructed or disintegrated. General reference by means of noun phrases such as 'elevation of vuee' is also made in Chauliac's treatise on *Ulcers* (c. 1425),<sup>49</sup> and in the *Secret of Secrets*, which refers to the 'corrupcion' of sight.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, noun phrases refer to a state between vision and blindness using the head noun *eyes*, the determiner *that* and adjectives or participles that refer to a particular symptom, like *bleared* ('dimmed with tears, morbid matter, or inflammation', OED). This can be seen in the so-called *Leechbook*, a medical prose miscellany

44 On medieval understanding of the etiology of, and cures for, blindness see further Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, esp. chapter 7.

45 MEMT: Benvenutus Grassus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye*, c1475–1499.

46 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 1, 109.

47 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 1, 109.

48 Rupescissa, *The Consideration of Quintessence*. (MEMT: Rupescissa, *Remedies*, c1450.)

49 Chauliac Guy de, *The Middle English Translation of Guy de Chauliac's Treatise on Ulcers*. (MEMT: Chauliac, *Ulcers*, ?c1425.)

50 Manzalaoui M.A., *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions* (Oxford: 1977) vol. 1: *Text*. (MEMT: *Secrete of Secretes*, c1500 [c1450].)

compiled at the beginning of the fifteenth century, which recommends a cure '[f]or eyen þat buþ blerid'.<sup>51</sup>

The state between vision and blindness is often created by verbs indicating a gradual process of decay or of moving towards blindness. Most common are the material verb *make* or the temporal verb *begin to* preceding intransitive or transitive verbs, which then express the process of losing eyesight further. Material verbs are used as well: they refer to a weakening of the sense of sight (*lessen*), to the loss of sight (*lose*), or to impairment (*pair*). Trevisa, for instance, describes the loss of sight as a gradual process: 'first here yghen wexen dymme, and thane they haueth defaute of sight, and at the last the vertu of sight failleth and they lesith al here sight'.<sup>52</sup> Material verbs may also express a process of improvement like *change*, *clear*, *clarify*/*purge*/*purify* (the sight) and *expel* (a disease).

Construing a liminal state between vision and blindness by means of both negative polarity and comparisons illustrates that the healthy state is always the starting point of description. These strategies can be found in medical treatises and in encyclopaedias of the late medieval period. The use of comparisons construes different degrees of blindness and sightedness and functions similarly to negations. Grassus, for example, writes that 'those men þat haue the humors lowe set [...] se best [...] for a tyme' – until they are 'abowt xxxti wynter or more', which is when 'here syght begynnnyth to peyre'.<sup>53</sup> Another pattern that emerges is the predicative use of adverbs like *well* or *clearly* in co-occurrence with the verb *see*, which is then negated by means of the particle *not*: 'The second sekenes cawsyd of flewme in the eyon ys when þei appere trobled and ful of venys closed with a pannycle so that the pacyent may not wele se'; or 'the pacyent may nought clerelich se summe tyme'.<sup>54</sup> Trevisa distinguishes between 'grete and stepe eizen', which are 'feble of sihȝt and seep noȝt wel afferre', and 'depe eizen', which 'seþ wel afer'.<sup>55</sup> The effect of these contrasting structures realised through syntactic negation is interpersonal/attitudinal.<sup>56</sup> Psycholinguistic research has illustrated that negatives entail

51 Edmar D., *MS. Wellcome 405: A Middle English Leech-Book*, Licentiate thesis (Stockholm: 1967). (MEMT, *Leechbook*, c1400–1450.)

52 MEMT: Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 1398.

53 MEMT: Benvenutus Grassus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye*, c1475–1499.

54 MEMT: Benvenutus Grassus, *The Wonderful Art of the Eye*, c1475–1499.

55 MEMT: Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 1398.

56 Givón T., *English Grammar: A Function-Based Introduction*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: 1993) vol. 1, 202.



the positive counterpart: 'negating the frame evokes the frame'.<sup>57</sup> The negated concept is given particular significance because an entity is deleted but at the same time evoked, which in the corpus of texts looked at construes the concept of the stage in-between vision and blindness: the phrases 'may not well see' or 'no perfect sight' do not refer to a state of absolute blindness, but to a partial visual impairment the degree of which is left unspecified.

Our analysis has shown that in MEMENTO, visual disabilities are construed by a number of specific linguistic patterns, which are not (yet) constituted of particular, repetitive technical terms, but rather by lexico-grammatical constructions that comprise specific verbal process types, negations and comparisons as well as specific noun phrase realisations and reference to selected semantic domains.

### Constructions of Visual Disabilities in Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale"

The knowledge concerning vision, visual impairments and its causes and symptoms was not only available in the form of highly specialised medical and ophthalmic texts. Medieval scholars have drawn increasing attention to the flow of knowledge between different discourses in the later medieval period and have demonstrated that, as the editors of a recent volume on the interrelations between medicine, science and literature put it, 'it proves anachronistic to think of medical, religious and literary practices as occupying separate spheres'.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in the late medieval period, medical and optical material infused religious and secular literature of various genres.<sup>59</sup> While scholars of medieval literature have long focused on blindness and disease as metaphors for spiritual lack and a sinful body,<sup>60</sup> more recent scholarship has been

57 Clark H.H. – Clark E.V., *Psychology and Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics* (New York: 1977) 110.

58 Falconer R. – Renevey D., "Introduction", in Falconer R. – Renevey D. (eds.), *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science and Medicine*, SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 28 (Tübingen: 2013) 11–17, 13.

59 E.g. Ziegler J., *Medicine and Religion c.1300: The Case of Arnau Vilanova* (Oxford: 1998) 49; Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space*.

60 Among more recent studies which investigate the disabled body as a sinful body are Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*; Eyler, *Disability in the Middle Ages*; Pearman, *Women and Disability*. Irina Metzler has shown that in the medieval period 'links between sin and illness or impairment were not made consistently'. Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 63.

particularly interested in the scientific terminology pervading medieval literature and in the sources of medical knowledge informing these texts. Thus, Rosanne Gasse has shown that the medical language in William Langland's allegorical dream-poem *Piers Plowman*, which has long been dismissed as 'only metaphor', reveals the author's familiarity with medical knowledge and terminology.<sup>61</sup> Virginia Langum, focusing on the portrait of the seven deadly sins in Passus v of this poem, has convincingly argued that the description of the eye conditions of the personified sins not only resonates with religious but also with medical texts and that the specific conditions allocated to the sins occur in medical texts, such as Guy de Chauliac's *Cyrurgie*, and in encyclopaedic texts like Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things*.<sup>62</sup> Tory Vandeventer Pearman has argued that John Gower in his portrayal of Amans' lovesickness in the *Confessio Amantis* closely follows medieval medical commentaries, which explain that lovesickness may result in an affliction of the eyes.<sup>63</sup> Peter Brown and a number of other Chaucerian scholars have pointed at the significance of medieval optics as an intellectual context for Chaucer's work.<sup>64</sup> They have shown that the medieval science of optics (*perspectiva*) clearly informed Chaucer's writings and that sight, perception and visual deception are central to several of his works. As Peter Brown has argued, optical material reached Chaucer through various channels: optical treatises in Latin, such as Alhacen's highly influential *De Aspectibus* or its extended thirteenth-century version provided by the Silesian scholar Witelo, encyclopaedic texts, such as the second part of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius*, homiletic writings, in which

61 Gasse R., "The Practice of Medicine in *Piers Plowman*", *The Chaucer Review* 39 (2004) 177–197.

62 Langum V., "Langland's Diseased Vision", *Avista* 19 (2009) 42–45, 42.

63 Vandeventer Pearman T., "Blindness, Confession, and Re-Membering in Gower's *Confessio*", *Accessus: A Journal of Premodern Literature and New Media* 1 (2013) 1–35, esp. 9–13. On lovesickness in medieval texts see Wack M.F., *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: 1990), esp. 10 and 199–205.

64 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space*. See also Holley L.T., *Chaucer's Measuring Eye* (Houston: 1990); Collette C.P., *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in The Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor: 2001); Collette C., "Seeing and Believing in the 'Franklin's Tale'", *The Chaucer Review* 26, 4 (1992) 395–410; Akbari S.C., *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 2004), esp. chapter 8; Katz Seal S., "Pregnant Desire: Eyes and Appetites in the Merchant's Tale", *The Chaucer Review* 48 (2014) 284–306.

optical material appeared in moralised examples,<sup>65</sup> and literary works which assimilated optical ideas, such as the *Roman de la Rose* and Dante's *Commedia*.<sup>66</sup>

While optical ideas pervade many of Chaucer's writings, it is the genre of the fabliau with its focus on trickery and deception<sup>67</sup> which proves most interesting for our investigation of linguistic constructions of partial blindness and of the loss, and retrieval, of vision as a gradual process. Trickery and deception play a central role in the fabliau,<sup>68</sup> and as Michelle Kohler has shown, visual deception and 'ocular gullibility' are key elements of this genre.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in some fabliaux, trickery and visual deception are intricately connected. In Chaucer's "Reeve's Tale", for example, the Miller's plan to deceive the two clerks is expressed with a metaphor of visual deception: 'yet shal I blere hir ye'.<sup>70</sup> We have already encountered the adjective 'bleryed' (bleary-eyed) in Gilbertus Anglicus. Here, a term used in scientific and encyclopaedic texts is figuratively used by Chaucer to express the idea of deception.

In the "Merchant's Tale", the themes of blindness and visual deception are omnipresent. The old and lecherous January, who has 'folwed ay his bodily delyt / On women', chooses to continue this 'blisful lyf' by getting married to a young woman, May.<sup>71</sup> At the height of his sexual fulfilment, he is struck blind only to regain his vision in time for him to witness his wife having sex in a pear tree with his young squire Damyan. Various critics have drawn attention to January's blindness as a metaphor for his self-deception.<sup>72</sup> More recently, the etiology of January's blindness has been read in the context of medieval

65 An influential thirteenth-century collection of exempla which used optical material, Peter of Limoges' *Liber de oculi morali*, a text which circulated in many copies in medieval England, has recently been made available in translation: Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise of the Eye*, translated with an introduction by R. Newhauser (Toronto: 2012). See further Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 94–103; Klassen N., *Chaucer on Love, Knowledge and Sight* (Woodbridge: 1995), esp. 52.

66 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 111–175.

67 Stearns Schenck M.J., *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception* (Philadelphia: 1987) xi.

68 Stearns Schenck, *The Fabliaux* xi.

69 Kohler M., "Vision, Logic, and the Comic Production of Reality in the *Merchant's Tale* and Two French Fabliaux", *The Chaucer Review* 39 (2004) 137–150.

70 Chaucer, *CT* I.4049. In his prologue, the Reeve says that he could also have chosen to tell a story about the 'bleryng of a proud milleres eye' (I.3865). In Chaucer's "Canon's Yeoman's Tale", too, 'blered' is used in the sense of deluded: 'And of my swynk yet blered ismyn ye' (*CT* VIII.730).

71 Chaucer, *CT* IV.1249–1250 and 1259.

72 The narrator uses blindness as a metaphor for January's delusion when he comments on the old man's choice of a young wife: 'For love is blynd alday, and may nat see' (*CT* IV.1598). On his self-deception see for example Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images* 82–87.

medical treatises and encyclopaedias, which associate blindness with gluttony and sexual excess.<sup>73</sup> As noted above, Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things*, for example, states that immoderate diet and 'contynuel dronkenes' as well as 'ofte seruyse of Venus' may corrupt one's vision.<sup>74</sup> Overindulgence in sex was thought to deplete the body of its vital moisture, without which the eye turns blind.<sup>75</sup> January's instantaneous loss, and recovery, of eyesight would have been familiar to medieval readers from the miracles mentioned earlier where sinful behaviour is punished by sudden blindness and sight may be as miraculously regained by a healing saint. The miraculous healing is here performed by a pagan God, Pluto: 'To Januarie he gaf agayn his sighte, / And made hym se as wel as evere he myghte'.<sup>76</sup>

Until this moment in the tale, the changes between the conditions of sightedness and total blindness are presented as sudden transformations. It is May who complements these two categories by that of incomplete, or dimmed, vision. Caught in flagrante by her husband, May knows how to turn the situation to her advantage. Granted by Pluto's wife Proserpina the gift of a clever answer,<sup>77</sup> she claims that he has not yet recovered his vision fully. She did not have sex, she maintains, but merely struggled with a man, which she claims had been recommended to her as a remedy for January's blindness. Since his eyesight is not fully recovered, she continues to argue, her 'medicine' must have been faulty:

'Thanne is,' quod she, 'my medicyne fals;  
For certainly, if that ye myghte se,  
Ye wolde nat seyn thise wordes unto me.  
Ye han som glymsyng, and no parfit sighte.'<sup>78</sup>

73 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 157–158. Palmer J.M., "Your Malady Is No 'Sodeyn Hap': Ophthalmology, Benvenutus Grassus, and January's Blindness in the Merchant's Tale", *The Chaucer Review* 41 (2006) 197–205; Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind* 144–148.

74 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 1, 360.

75 See Jacquart D. – Thomasset C., *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Adamson (Cambridge: 1988) 56; Everest, "Sight and Sexual Performance in the Merchant's Tale" 100. Trevisa notes that in old age, a depletion of moisture and body heat causes gradual blindness (*On the Properties of Things* 1, 364). Following this reasoning, old men (like January) could not 'afford' to further drain their bodies of its remaining vital spirit by sexual excess.

76 Chaucer, *CT* IV.2355–2356. See further Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil* 225–227.

77 Chaucer, *CT* IV.2265–2266.

78 Chaucer, *CT* IV.2379–2383.

January's temporary impairment is construed lexically by reference to a type of vision, 'glymsyng' and, grammatically, by means of the strategy of using a negation introduced by the negative particle *no* in the noun phrase 'no parfit sighte'.

This strategy is taken up again when May tries to explain to January that regaining vision is also a gradual process (like waking up) which includes a temporary state between vision and blindness. Like a man who has just woken up from sleep, she continues to argue, a man cured from blindness may suffer from distorted vision:

But, sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep,  
 He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep  
 Upon a thyng, ne seen it parfitly,  
 Til that he be adawed verrailly.  
 Right so a man that longe hath blynd ybe,  
 Ne may nat sodeynly so wel yse,  
 First whan his sighte is newe come ageyn,  
 As he that hath a day or two yseyn.  
 Til that youre sighte ysatled be a while  
 Ther may ful many a sighte yow bigile.<sup>79</sup>

According to May's reasoning, sight is only gradually being improved. This gradual process is linguistically construed by the use of temporal adverbs such as 'suddenly', 'til' and 'long', which collocate with negative particles negating the references to blindness and vision 'longe hath blynd ybe' and '[n]e may nat sodeynly so wel yse'. Furthermore, the use of the procedural verb *come*, the adverb of time 'newe' and the temporal relative pronoun *when* ('whan') as well as other temporal adjuncts like 'a day or two' and 'a while' further suggest that perfect sight cannot be regained immediately. In addition, May downgrades the degree of certainty that January will ever regain perfect vision by using the modal auxiliary *may* in '[t]here may ful many a sighte yow begile'.

As Peter Brown has shown, for May's skilful reasoning Chaucer drew on accounts in optical and encyclopaedic texts of how vision may be impeded.<sup>80</sup> Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* for example (a text well known to Chaucer)<sup>81</sup> explains that 'when someone for a long time has closed his eyes or has

79 Chaucer, *CT* IV.2397–2406.

80 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 152–160.

81 Pauline Aiken has written extensively on Chaucer's use of this encyclopaedia. See for example her "Vincent of Beauvais and Dame Pertelote's Knowledge of Medicine",

been in darkness [...] he does not see well'.<sup>82</sup> The idea of weak eyesight leading to visual error may have been inspired by Alhacen's *De aspectibus* or by Witelo's elaboration of this text, which includes a discussion of visual deception.<sup>83</sup> Witelo, as Brown shows, 'points out that a weak eye takes longer than a normal, healthy eye to register visual events'<sup>84</sup> and explains faulty perceptions with the discrepancy between what the observer sees and what they expect to see: 'a disease of the eyes', Witelo writes, 'can sometimes cause a horse to appear as an ass'.<sup>85</sup> May thus manages to persuade her husband that he did not see what he did, in fact, see. The old man concedes that what he saw may have been imagined: 'me thoughte he dide thee so', he says, and: 'I wende han seyn'.<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion

Chaucer's January suffers from two kinds of visual impairment. In accordance with medieval medical wisdom and moralistic interpretation, he is actually struck blind as a result of his debauchery. His vision is then miraculously restored by divine intervention in a manner typical of countless miracle narratives, though in his case this is not redemptive but punitive because what he is supposed to see is his young wife's adulterous act. Intriguingly, he is then, however, tricked into doubting his visual prowess. Having recourse to experiential phenomena of impaired vision, unfaithful May 'construes' January as disabled. His second blindness, or rather the notion of his impaired vision is verbally insinuated to him and, fool that he is, the old man falls for his young wife's deception. He not only accepts his (temporarily) disabled status but, unbeknownst to him, at the same time takes the sting out of the punishment his restored vision was meant to impose on him. This of course is where the allegorical potential of the narrative once again merges with the medical or, rather, the psychological.

The polyvalence of Chaucer's narrative is as such particularly fascinating in the context of medieval perceptions of visual impairments and disabilities,

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*Speculum* 10 (1935) 281–287 and her "Vincent of Beauvais and the 'Houres' of Chaucer's Physician", *Speculum* 53 (1956) 22–24.

82 Cited from Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 157.

83 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 156.

84 Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 156.

85 Cited from Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* 157.

86 Chaucer, *CT* IV.2386 and 2393.

no less than their instantaneous or gradual alteration. While there may not be many texts as highly charged in relation to their articulation of visual capability or its lack, other medieval texts of various genres also refer to a plethora of visual conditions, ranging from total blindness to perfect sight. They express visual impairments as a continuum: 'to turn blind' in these texts is rarely described as a sudden onset but rather as a gradual process. The recovery of sight, too, is not depicted as an instantaneous occurrence but as a gradual improvement.

Drawing on a corpus of selected medical texts (MEMT), and applying historical corpus linguistic and stylistic methodologies, we analysed how those degrees between vision and blindness were expressed in specialist literature. We have shown that there are surprisingly few lexical references to visual impairments in medical texts. Instead, linguistic constructions of visual disabilities are realised in these texts by specific lexico-grammatical constructions, such as specific noun phrases, negated linguistic expressions and comparative constructions as well as particular verbal process types and semantic domains, such as:

- references not only to *see*, *eye*, *blind*, *blindness* but also to the adjectives *clear*, *strong* and *sharp*, *feeble*, *dim* and *weak*; references to verbs like *clear*, *clarify*, *purge* and *quicken* as well as *wax*, *lessen*, *pair* and *dim*;
- reference to the conceptual domains vision and sight, (im)perfection, diseases of the eyes;
- use of specific noun phrases with generic references to hindrance or difficulty (i.e. impediment);
- use of negated constructions collocating with the verb *see*;
- use of comparative constructions.

Yet knowledge concerning vision, visual impairments and its causes and symptoms was restricted neither to the authors nor the readers of highly specialised medical and ophthalmic texts. Generic boundaries were permeable, and by the fourteenth century visual material had become available to a wider readership through encyclopaedic and homiletic writings. Writers like Chaucer, Gower and Langland seem to have relied on the familiarity of their audiences with such material and with the terminology to express eyesight and its disorders. Judging from their references to, and creative uses of, visual material, it appears that by the late fourteenth century constructions of vision and impaired vision had become part of the linguistic repertoire. Articulation of the potential spectrum between full vision and complete blindness was also part of this



repertoire. It acknowledged and made use of processes of becoming impaired not only as an allegorical tool for the dissemination of moral instruction but also, though frequently interrelated, as a physical development.

Chaucer's "The Merchant's Tale" illustrates how disability may be imagined, both in the imagination of those affected and in that of those not affected, who nevertheless imagine the experience of visual impairment with such verisimilitude as to convince the formerly affected that he is still suffering from impaired vision. May's wayward reasoning clearly is an example of the discursive construction of disabled vision. As Mieke Rodas claims, 'blindness is ultimately about language'.<sup>87</sup> While this obviously applies only to notions of visual disability, not to the 'real' visual impairment, our analysis has shown that linguistic constructions indeed provide the basis for constructions of visual impairment as disability already in the Middle Ages. This is particularly evident in the frequent use of terms or constructions which insist on a negative in contradistinction to the positive, on the *dis*-abled condition as opposed to the 'normal', and normative, abled one: sight is 'noȝt scharp' (not sharp), vision is 'combred' (hampered). What emerges from these examples is that visual impairments were linguistically construed as visual disabilities. Historical usage in this way demonstrates the power of language to articulate social constructions of otherness while the exploration of its literary context suggests its power also as an instrument of disciplining the other by attaching a moral value to disability.

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## Exterior Inspection and Regular Reason: Robert Hooke's and Margaret Cavendish's Epistemologies of the Senses

*Virginia Richter*

### Framing the Senses in 1660s Natural Philosophy

Natural philosophy in the wake of Francis Bacon advocated the use of the senses, rather than the reliance on authorities, as the proper way to perceive and understand nature. However, from the inception of the New Science, *empeiria*, the perception of natural objects, was not an unproblematic given. For Bacon, the empirical study of nature is mediated by instruments that supplement the observer's senses as well as by techniques of documentation and presentation.<sup>1</sup> When the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge was founded in 1660, its fellows set great store by both aspects: the control of the individual observer's sensual perception and the establishment of collective empiricism.<sup>2</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, the adherents of experimental philosophy had to engage with a set of questions: how reliable are the unaided human senses? What is the effect of instruments on the quality of perception – is the latter enhanced or distorted? By which intellectual processes are distinct sensory impressions assimilated, or put differently, what is the relationship between the senses and the mind? How can sensory perception be shared, and hence, how can the intersubjective validity of empirical observation be insured?

The regulation of the senses was one of the foremost aims of the methodology advocated by the Royal Society. Using classical and scholastic philosophy as a negative foil, the Royal Society's first historian, Thomas Sprat, enumerated

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- 1 See Wolf B., "Erzählen im Experiment: Narratologie und Wissenschaftsgeschichte am Kreuzweg der zwei Kulturen", in Gamper M. (ed.), *Experiment und Literatur: Themen, Methoden, Theorien* (Göttingen: 2010) 208–237, 212f.
  - 2 This term is used by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison to describe the emergence of a scientific collective in the eighteenth century, but it can be applied fruitfully to the programme pursued by the Royal Society. See Daston L. – Galison P., *Objectivity* (New York: 2007) 19.

the epistemic virtues – ‘norms that are internalized and enforced by appeal to ethical values, as well as to pragmatic efficacy in securing knowledge’<sup>3</sup> – conducive to ‘the Perfection in true Knowledge’;<sup>4</sup> the ‘*Drudgery and Burden of Observation*’;<sup>5</sup> ‘the tedious Trial of Experiments’;<sup>6</sup> ‘a good Method of Thinking, and a right Course of apprehending Things’;<sup>7</sup> an ‘easie, natural, and unaffected’ style,<sup>8</sup> and the necessity to transcend individual enquiry in favour of an intersubjective system of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, good scientific practice is methodical, circumspective and accumulative. Pejorative terms such as drudgery are revalorised to denote the patience and precision underlying empiricism. From this set of recommended procedures, Sprat derived a general precept for the New Science:

The true Philosophy must be first of all begun, on a scrupulous, and severe Examination of Particulars; from there may be some general Rules with great Caution drawn: But it must not rest there, nor is that the most difficult Part of its Course. It must advance those Principles, to the finding out of new effects, through all the Varieties of Matter; and so both the Courses must proceed orderly together; from experimenting to demonstrating, and from demonstrating to experimenting again.<sup>10</sup>

While the ‘Examination of Particulars’ forms the epistemological basis of experimental philosophy, and thus places observation rooted in sensory perception at the centre of its practice, this passage shows that the Royal Society’s methodology was not confined to induction. Rather, general rules are formed abductively, moving ‘with great Caution’ between particulars and principles. Demonstration – the public presentation of experiments – is as important as the experiment proper: only if its effects can be reproduced, comprehended and confirmed collectively is the experiment valid.<sup>11</sup> Collective empiricism

3 Daston – Galison, *Objectivity* 40f.

4 Sprat T., *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge*, 14th ed. (London: 1734) 15.

5 Sprat, *History* 7. Emphasis in the original.

6 Sprat, *History* 12.

7 Sprat, *History* 15.

8 Sprat, *History* 16.

9 Sprat, *History* 31.

10 Sprat, *History* 31.

11 See Shapin S., “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Isis* 79 (1988) 373–404, 375 and Shapin S. – Schaffer S., *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: 1985) 25.

achieved through demonstration is thus the principal method of controlling the potentially unreliable senses of an individual experimenter. Hence, 'true Philosophy' presupposes a scientific community with shared epistemic virtues, including a shared sense of the workings of perception and observation. A natural philosopher's positioning in relation to this set of values in consequence determines his or her position in the field of knowledge production. However, not all kinds of sense perception are of equal value. In the case of the Royal Society, the members' habitus as 'men of science' and hence as reliable and relevant witnesses to experiments was bound up with their positioning as 'gentlemen': 'the condition of gentlemen was the condition for the reliability and objectivity of experimental knowledge'.<sup>12</sup> Lab technicians (who had the status of servants) and women were therefore not eligible 'to validate experimental knowledge as participants'.<sup>13</sup> They were credited with a lesser ability to control their senses; women, moreover, were believed to use their senses differently from men, in a way that precluded their participation in experimental philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, physical access to the sites of experimentation as well as symbolic access to knowledge production were regulated by gender as well as by rank. Robert Boyle, the son of the first Earl of Cork, epitomised the man of science of aristocratic background; Robert Hooke, of middle-class extraction, had to rely on Boyle's patronage to achieve his position as Curator of the Royal Society and later Professor of Geometry at Gresham College. By contrast, Margaret Cavendish was excluded from the scientific community around the Royal Society<sup>15</sup> despite her affiliation with patrons of the New Science.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Shapin, "The House of Experiment" 396.

13 Shapin, "The House of Experiment" 390.

14 See Classen C., "The Witch's Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity", in Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 70–84.

15 Cavendish's relations with the Royal Society were fraught. While she was not admitted as a member, she famously visited the Royal Society in 1667; see Mintz S., "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952) 168–176. Despite her epistemological distance from the New Science, the rhetorical style of her late works – after her return from exile – was influenced by the plain style advocated by Thomas Sprat; see Nate R., "'Plain and Vulgarly Express'd': Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science" [2001], in Mendelson S.H. (ed.), *Ashgate Critical Essays on Women Writers in England, 1550–1700: Volume 7. Margaret Cavendish* (Farnham, Surrey: 2009) 235–249.

16 Both her husband William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle, and her brother-in-law Sir Charles Cavendish pursued scientific interests. Through them, Margaret Cavendish



As a woman she could not become a member; she was also viewed critically on account of her deliberate violation of contemporary gender norms.<sup>17</sup> While using her social position as a member of the aristocracy to secure a nominal respect from scientific institutions, especially the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the Duchess of Newcastle simultaneously adopted a mode of self-representation that 'ensured a considerable distance from the Royal Society's collective enterprise'.<sup>18</sup> Her performative and textual construction of the female philosopher as an independent noblewoman – an Empress in her fictional *Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666) – contrasted starkly with 'the particular norms of social interaction and comportment that were taken as proper for governing the collective behaviour of the experimental community'.<sup>19</sup> This marginal position, however, allowed her to criticise experimental philosophy's view of the senses and to develop her own holistic model of sense perception:

Cavendish's commitment to organic materialism gave her the ability to offer a 'stranger's account' of the new science and thereby to display epistemological problems and social pretensions in the claims of the

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came into contact with savants such as Hobbes, Descartes, Gassendi and Mersenne. For an overview of Cavendish's natural philosophy in the context of seventeenth-century scientific thought, see Sarasohn L.T., *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore: 2010); James S., "The Philosophical Innovations of Margaret Cavendish" [1999], in Mendelson, *Ashgate Critical Essays* 209–234; Strauss E., *Die Arithmetik der Leidenschaften: Margaret Cavendishs Naturphilosophie* (Stuttgart: 1999); Blaydes S.B., "Nature Is a Woman: The Duchess of Newcastle and Seventeenth-Century Philosophy", in Mell D.C., Jr – Braun T.E.D. – Palmer L.M. (eds.), *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment* (East Lansing, MI: 1988) 51–64; Smith H., *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana, IL: 1982).

- 17 See Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy* 5. In contrast to other female philosophers who pursued their intellectual interests in a domestic setting, Cavendish actively sought public recognition and discussed her role as an aristocratic woman author in numerous prefaces to her works. For a comparison of different models of pursuing science for women, see Harris F., "Living in the Neighbourhood of Science: Mary Evelyn, Margaret Cavendish and the Greshamites", in Hunter L. – Hutton S. (eds.), *Women, Science and Medicine 1500–1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society* (Stroud: 1997) 198–217 and Hutton S., "Anne Conway, Margaret Cavendish and Seventeenth-Century Scientific Thought", in Hunter – Hutton, *Women, Science and Medicine* 218–234.
- 18 Dear P., "A Philosophical Duchess: Understanding Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society", in Cummins J. – Burchell D. (eds.), *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: 2007) 125–142, 127.
- 19 Dear, "A Philosophical Duchess" 130.

experimentalists. Thus, although the gender-based intellectual and institutional constraints she lived under denied her the ability to explore the uses of experiment, those very constraints gave her the opportunity to consider the practice and the epistemological claims of experimental science from the intellectual margins. [...] Ideally, Cavendish wanted her ideas to be included in the process of debate; denied that, she offered an analysis that is insightful precisely because it is spoken from outside the discursive and institutional forums it explores.<sup>20</sup>

Cavendish's most important contention with experimental philosophy, her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) – a text responding to while evincing 'deliberate antipathy'<sup>21</sup> towards the experimental method – centred on the senses and, in particular, the use of optical instruments advocated by Robert Hooke. In large part written in direct response to Hooke's *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses, with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon* (1665), Cavendish's treatise took issue with Hooke's theory of the senses as principally defective, his advocacy of optical instruments, and the resulting concept of nature as divisible, manipulable and inanimate. Her critique of *Micrographia* then served as a vantage point from which she developed her own epistemology of the senses: 'rational perception' rooted in the whole body rather than in individual sense organs, and presupposing a unity of matter and mind.

### Discovering New Sensory Worlds

In the decades after the foundation of the Royal Society, the senses were conceptually and technologically framed by newly developed or improved instruments such as the telescope, the microscope and the air pump, as well as by predominantly visual practices such as micrography and astronomical observation and practices involving a multiplicity of senses such as chemical experiments and dissection.<sup>22</sup> Due to the spectacular innovations of optical instruments in early modernity, sight was privileged both in contemporary debates and later histories of science, and has often figured as the dominant

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20 Keller E., "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science" [1997], in Mendelson, *Ashgate Critical Essays* 171–195, 174.

21 Dear, "A Philosophical Duchess" 127.

22 See Shapin – Schaffer, *Leviathan* 36.

sense in modernity.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, while the classical hierarchy of the senses, with sight as the most important and noble sense, originates with Aristotle,<sup>24</sup> some modern theorists such as Marshall McLuhan have seen it as a marker of the great divide between premodern and modern conceptualisations of perception.<sup>25</sup> Yet the examples of chemistry and dissection show that, for instance, touch and smell continued to be of importance in scientific practice well beyond the seventeenth century.<sup>26</sup> Already Thomas Sprat, while praising Hooke's discovery of 'a far greater Number of different Things' with the help of the microscope 'than were contain'd in the visible Universe before,'<sup>27</sup> claimed that the other senses would undergo a similar advancement by technological means: 'This Mr. *Hooke* has undertaken to make out, that *Tasting, Touching, Smelling, and Hearing*, are as improvable as the *Sight*; and from his excellent Performances in the one, we may well rely on his *Promise* in all the rest'.<sup>28</sup> The idea that all the senses are 'improvable,' and, indeed, in need of improvement, underpins experimental philosophy's epistemological trust in 'a technologically supplemented cyborg postlapsarian body that would be functionally equivalent to the prelapsarian Adam'.<sup>29</sup> This widely shared belief in the inherent deficiency, and consequent perfectibility, of the senses was one of the tenets contested by Margaret Cavendish.

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- 23 For a critique of ocularcentric accounts of the senses, see Jenner M.S.R., "Tasting Lichfield, Touching China: Sir John Floyer's Senses", *The Historical Journal* 53, 3 (2010) 647–670; Classen C., *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures* (London – New York: 1993); Jay M., *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 1993); Smith M.M., *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 2007).
- 24 See Jütte R., *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. J. Lynn (Cambridge: 2005) 65.
- 25 McLuhan M., *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: 1962); for a critique of McLuhan, see Smith, *Sensing the Past* 9.
- 26 For chemistry, see Roberts L., "The Death of the Sensuous Chemist: The 'New' Chemistry and the Transformation of Sensuous Technology", in Howes D., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 106–127; for dissection, see Sawday J., *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London – New York: 1995).
- 27 Sprat, *History* 384.
- 28 Sprat, *History* 384f. Emphasis in the original.
- 29 Wilding N., "Graphic Technologies", in Cooper M. – Hunter M. (eds.), *Robert Hooke: Tercentennial Studies* (Aldershot: 2006) 123–134, 123.

For Hooke, the human senses are 'deceivable'<sup>30</sup> and weak in comparison to animals: they are 'in many particulars outdone by those of other Creatures'.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, it is the proprium of humankind to be able to supplement the senses by artificial means, and this is what makes us superior to beasts: 'we have also the power of considering, comparing, altering, assisting, and improving them to various uses'.<sup>32</sup> With regard to a sound empirical methodology, both the deficiency and the perfectibility of the senses are crucial. The senses form the very basis of empirical inquiry, so that their dominion needs to be enlarged as part of the programmatic establishment of experimental philosophy; but they also need to be treated with epistemological suspicion, with a 'watchfulness over the[ir] failings'.<sup>33</sup> In consequence, the regulation of the senses constitutes a foundational task of experimental philosophy: 'It is therefore most worthy of our consideration, to recollect their several defects, that so we may better understand how to supply them, and by what assistances we may enlarge their power, and secure them in performing their particular duties'.<sup>34</sup> The microscope and the telescope not only fulfil both needs; the 'cyborg body' created with the help of these instruments surpasses any conceivable prelapsarian body and enables the discovery of new worlds:

The next care to be taken, in respect of the Senses, is a supplying of their infirmities with Instruments, and, as it were, the adding of artificial Organs to the natural; this in one of them has been of late years accomplished with prodigious benefit to all sorts of useful knowledge, by the invention of Optical Glasses. By the means of Telescopes, there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view: and by the help of Microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible World discovered to the understanding. By this means the Heavens are open'd, and a vast number of new Stars, and new Motions, and new Productions appear in them, to which all the ancient Astronomers were utterly Strangers. By this the Earth it self, which lyes so neer us, under our feet, shews quite a new thing to us, and in every little particle of its matter; we now behold almost as great a variety of

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30 Hooke Robert, *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon* (London: 1665; reprint, The Original Classic Edition: n.d.) 3.

31 Hooke, *Micrographia* 2.

32 Hooke, *Micrographia* 2.

33 Hooke, *Micrographia* 3.

34 Hooke, *Micrographia* 2.

Creatures, as we were able before to reckon up in the whole Universe it self.<sup>35</sup>

The ultimate aim of this research programme is as grand as it can be, but the method is humble. Hooke promises a new perception of the world that is akin to a second creation, one that will alter humankind's knowledge of natural history in an even bigger way than the discovery of America did, but he undertakes to achieve this revolution by 'small Labours'.<sup>36</sup> This rhetoric of modesty ties Hooke's micrographical project securely to the epistemic virtues enumerated by Thomas Sprat: the tediousness of repeated experiments, the commitment to precise observation ('to record, the things themselves as they appear'),<sup>37</sup> the avoidance of speculation, the use of a plain style, and the subordination of personal ambition under a larger collective endeavour ('If I have contributed the meanest foundations whereon others may raise nobler Superstructures, I am abundantly satisfied').<sup>38</sup> The rhetoric of *Micrographia*, its endorsement of a mechanistic approach to natural phenomena, its serial structure – Hooke describes sixty observations made with the help of optical instruments – and the abundant use of illustrations<sup>39</sup> render Hooke's treatise an exemplar of the New Science, designed to position its methodology in the mainstream of knowledge production. Conversely, the book also offered itself as a point of attack for fundamental critiques of experimental philosophy: 'In choosing *Micrographia* for critique, Cavendish focused on a specific text, but through it she voiced her opposition to the Baconian enterprise as a whole, from its claims of procedural objectivity and the value-neutrality of its findings to its promises of social renewal and intellectual progress'.<sup>40</sup>

For experimental philosophers, the function of instruments went far beyond that of useful technical aids to the senses; they were closely tied to the epistemology of experimental philosophy as well as to its conceptualisation of the natural world. As Jim Bennett has argued, instruments developed an agency of their own by 'training' researchers' observational habits and,

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35 Hooke, *Micrographia* 3.

36 Hooke, *Micrographia* 4.

37 Hooke, *Micrographia* 4.

38 Hooke, *Micrographia* 4.

39 *Micrographia* contains 38 plates based on Hooke's own drawings. See Doherty M.C., "Discovering the 'True Form': Hooke's *Micrographia* and the Visual Vocabulary of Engraved Portraits", *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 66 (2012) 211–234.

40 Keller, "Producing Petty Gods" 176.

consequently, their conceptualisation of the natural world: 'A familiarity [...] with instruments, devices and machines in the everyday, macro world tuned and prepared the mind for constructing explanations of the unseen, micro world that lay behind all the phenomena of our experience'.<sup>41</sup> Underlying this correspondence is a notion of nature as mechanical. Hooke posited that the Royal Society's endeavour 'anew to correct all Hypotheses by sense'<sup>42</sup> was resulting in a shift in the way natural phenomena are accounted for: 'those effects of Bodies, which have been commonly attributed to Qualities, and those confess'd to be occult, are perform'd by the small Machines of Nature, which are not to be discern'd without these helps [optical instruments], seeming the mere products of Motion, Figure, and Magnitude'.<sup>43</sup> Just as the imperfect mechanisms of the human senses can be corrected by machines, so the invisible machinery of nature can be discerned, understood and eventually improved by technically enhanced observation.

If instruments constitute researchers' epistemological framework by teaching them new ways of seeing nature, a similar task has to be achieved on behalf of the witnesses of science who also form an indispensable part of collective empiricism. *Micrographia* exemplarily fulfils the function of 'virtual witnessing' which, according to Shapin and Schaffer, was the main task of printed works:

Through virtual witnessing the multiplication of witnesses could be, in principle, unlimited. It was therefore the most powerful technology for constituting matters of fact. The validation of experiments, and the crediting of their outcomes as matters of fact, necessarily entailed their realization in the laboratory of the mind and the mind's eye. What was required was a technology of trust and assurance that the things had been done and done in the way claimed.<sup>44</sup>

To achieve the desired effect, the scientific text had to offer a great 'density of circumstantial detail'<sup>45</sup> which in *Micrographia* was also backed up by meticulous engravings. Through literary techniques that simulated closeness and

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41 Bennett J., "Instruments and Ingenuity", in Cooper M. – Hunter M. (eds.), *Robert Hooke: Tercentennial Studies* (Aldershot: 2006) 65–76, 67.

42 Hooke, *Micrographia* 13.

43 Hooke, *Micrographia* 13.

44 Shapin – Schaffer, *Leviathan* 60.

45 Shapin – Schaffer, *Leviathan* 62.

immediacy the reader was constituted as a 'virtual witness'. This was done most effectively when the 'new visible Worlds' disclosed by the microscope were in fact close to home, when the hitherto invisible had already made itself felt to the reader's other senses. A case in point was the louse, 'a Creature so officious, that 'twill be known to every one at one time or other, so busie, and so impudent, that it will be intruding it self in every ones company'.<sup>46</sup> This ubiquitous inhabitant of the human body would remain hidden from sight 'did not my faithful Mercury, my Microscope, bring me other information of it'.<sup>47</sup> In this introductory paragraph to observation 54, Hooke departs from a strictly objective, detached style; his jocular tone creates a sense of familiarity between author and reader. Having established this affective link, Hooke returns to an objective register in his description of what he sees through the microscope:

It has six legs, covered with a very **transparent** shell, and jointed exactly like a Crab's, or Lobster's; each leg is divided into six parts by these joynts, and those have here and there several small hairs; and at the end of each leg it has two claws, very properly adapted for its peculiar use, being thereby inabled to walk very securely both on the skin and the hair; and indeed this contrivance of the feet is very curious, and could not be made more commodiously and compendiously, for performing both these requisite motions, of walking and climbing up the hair of a mans head, then it is [...].<sup>48</sup>

The verbal description of the creature's 'very odd shape'<sup>49</sup> is reduplicated in a detailed engraving [Fig. 1] which shows the louse's size in relation to a human hair, and to which the description repeatedly refers. Jointly, the text and the visual representation create the mimetic density of detail stipulated by Shapin and Schaffer as a prerequisite for 'virtual witnessing'. The readers of *Micrographia* can put themselves 'virtually' in the place behind the microscope and intimately share Hooke's observations – without, however, having to undergo some of the more self-sacrificial aspects of the experimenter's observation of lice:

46 Hooke, *Micrographia* 136.

47 Hooke, *Micrographia* 136.

48 Hooke, *Micrographia* 136f.

49 Hooke, *Micrographia* 136.



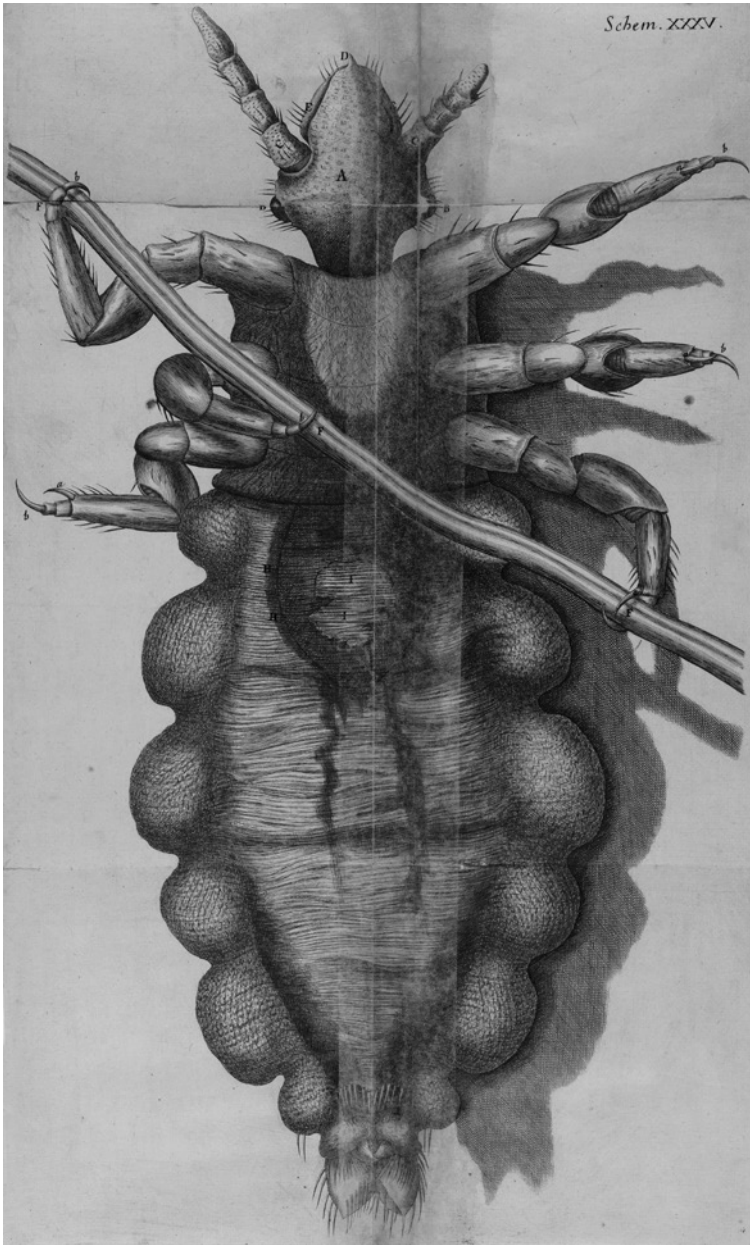


FIGURE 4.1 Robert Hooke, "Schema 35," copper-plate engraving of a louse in Hooke's *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses with Observations and Inquiries thereupon* (London, John Martyn – James Allestry: 1665).

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having kept several of them in a box for two or three dayes, so that for all that time they had nothing to feed on, I found, upon letting one creep on my hand, that it immediately fell to sucking [...]. I could plainly see the blood, suck'd from my hand, to be variously distributed, and mov'd to and fro.<sup>50</sup>

Even if such passages are descriptive, they still have an emotive effect based on a common sensual experience. While Hooke's description and diagram constituted the first visual close encounter many of his readers had with a louse, they were all familiar with the itch of its bite.

### Rational Observations: Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Philosophy

Considering Hooke's commitment to gather information about the inhabitants of his newly discovered worlds, not even shrinking from blood sacrifice, Margaret Cavendish's repudiation of micrography seems almost churlish. Her swift and detailed response to *Micrographia* suggests that Hooke's forays into hitherto invisible worlds must have made a deep impression. Nevertheless, Cavendish refused to adopt the role of a virtual witness and to affirm the validity of his observations. To her, the magnification of natural objects was not a neutral act, but rather an interference that produced monsters: 'a louse by the help of a magnifying glass appears like a lobster', and hence, is 'misshapen rather than natural'.<sup>51</sup> Cavendish questioned Hooke's epistemological trust in artificially enhanced perception; she was not only sceptical regarding the distorting effect of microscopes but also regarding the epistemological soundness of the empirical method in general: 'I confess, I have but little faith in such arts, and as little in telescopical, microscopical, and the like inspections; and prefer rational and judicious observations, before deluding glasses and experiments'.<sup>52</sup> To her, mere 'exterior inspection' did not reveal the true nature of the material world; rather, effective sensual perception was embedded in, and inseparable from, language and even more importantly from mental conceptions, or 'regular reason'.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Hooke, *Micrographia* 136f.

<sup>51</sup> Cavendish M., *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. E. O'Neill (Cambridge: 2001) 50.

<sup>52</sup> Cavendish, *Observations* 4.

<sup>53</sup> Cavendish, *Observations* 9.

Although the *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* are patterned on the serial structure of Hooke's treatise and even directly take up several of his observations on charcoal, nettles, the eyes of flies, the sting of bees and so on, Cavendish's book can be regarded as an *Anti-Micrographia*. Cavendish dismisses the epistemic virtues of experimental philosophy and consequently misses the point of Hooke's detailed studies:

Truly, the art of augury was far more beneficial than the lately invented art of micrography; for I cannot perceive any great advantage this art doth bring us. [...] Wherefore, in my opinion, it is both time and labour lost: for, the inspection of the exterior part of vegetables, doth not give us any knowledge how to sow, set, plant, and graft; so that a gardener or husbandman will gain no advantage at all by this art: The inspection of a bee, through a microscope, will bring him no more honey; nor the inspection of a grain, more corn; neither will the inspection of dusty atoms, and reflexions of light, teach painters how to make and mix colours, although it may perhaps be an advantage to a decayed lady's face, by placing herself in such or such a reflexion of light, where the dusty atoms may hide her wrinkles. The truth is, most of these arts are fallacies, rather than discoveries of truth; for sense deludes more than it gives a true information, and an exterior inspection through an optic glass, is so deceiving, that it cannot be relied upon: Wherefore, regular reason is the best guide to all arts, as I shall make it appear in this following treatise.<sup>54</sup>

Cavendish's objections to experimental philosophy in general and micrography in particular are twofold. First, she criticises the abstract quality of the knowledge thus produced, and the resulting lack of practical benefits. In Baconian terminology, Hooke's experiments are not fructiferous. Second, she objects to an epistemological flaw, namely the idea that imperfections of the senses can be corrected by artificial instruments because it is impossible that 'deluding arts can inform the senses'.<sup>55</sup> Optical glasses, by distorting proportions and only showing the exterior of objects, simply aggravate the problem of defective senses; hence, Hooke's optical studies also fail to be luciferous.

The mechanical view of nature constituted the largest point of contention between the adherents of the New Science and Cavendish who advocated the idea of a nature endowed with 'self-motion',<sup>56</sup> that is, a materialistic concept

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54 Cavendish, *Observations* 9.

55 Cavendish, *Observations* 49.

56 Cavendish, *Observations* 21.

of nature in which, however, matter was seen as living and active. This basic assumption determined the direction of her argument: 'Instead of disenchanting nature, Cavendish wanted to unenchant it by incorporating soul and spirit into the natural constituents of things. In her universe, minerals, vegetables, animals, and humans all possess, to some extent, sense and reason'.<sup>57</sup> In her model of natural philosophy, all the senses and indeed a synaesthetic perceptual-cognitive system referred to as 'rational perception' contribute equally to the knowledge of nature. An effect of the whole body as well as the mind rather than individual sense organs, rational perception has the ability to transcend the immediate physical world, and thus builds a bridge to what Cavendish calls 'fiction[s] of the mind',<sup>58</sup> her literary works. Rational perception, for her, is not so much connected to mimesis, the – sensual and mechanical – reduplication of the perceived object, but to poesis, not to the discovery of invisible worlds, but to creative world-making. This is one reason why her reflections lack the mimetic density of detail Hooke's observations were striving hard to achieve. In its stead, she adopts a sceptical textual critique that questions the tenets of experimental philosophy on a much more general level, by revaluating its principles in a way that is suggestive of 'a post-Kuhnian and even a proto-feminist critique of the rational bases of mechanical science'.<sup>59</sup>

Cavendish rejected the methodology advocated by Sprat, Boyle, Hooke and other members of the Royal Society, and instead favoured an approach based on the unity of sensory perception and reasoning: 'But my ground is sense and reason, that is, I make self-moving matter, which is sensitive and rational, the only cause and principle of all natural effects'.<sup>60</sup> Sense in her usage does not simply denote the perception of external objects which are 'mechanical' and hence passive; rather, the act of perception is constituted by an interaction between sensory organ and object which she calls 'patterning or imitation': 'the motions of the sentient [body] in the act of perception, do figure out or imitate the motions of the object, so that the object is but as a copy that is figured out, or imitated by the sentient, which is the chief agent in all transforming and perceptive actions'.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, sensual perception is not a mechanical action, but rather a process of engagement involving construction and transformation. If sense is constructive and therefore aligned with reason, reason,

57 Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy* 11.

58 Cavendish M., *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. K. Lilley (London: 1992) 123.

59 Keller, "Petty Gods" 175.

60 Cavendish, *Observations* 18.

61 Cavendish, *Observations* 18.

on the other hand, denotes not only Cartesian rationality but also a specific way of perceiving 'subtle' objects distinct from sensory perception:

It is true, there are some objects which are not at all perceptible by any of our exterior senses; as for example, rarefied air, and the like: But although they be not subject to our exterior sensitive perception, yet they are subject to our rational perception, which is much purer and subtler than the sensitive; nay, so pure and subtle a knowledge, that many believe it to be immaterial [...], whenas it is only a pure, fine and subtle figurative motion or perception [...].<sup>62</sup>

In Cavendish's natural philosophy, nature is composed of different degrees of matter, inanimate and animate, the latter being divided into sensitive and rational; these are matched by different degrees of perception. Sensory perception is tied to the five senses and gives access to objects constituted by inanimate and sensitive matter; by contrast, rational perception is the highest mode of perception, operating without the direct help of sense organs, and is therefore more acute and more reliable. Objects invisible to the ordinary senses can be apprehended by this 'fine and subtle figurative motion or perception'. However, Cavendish never quite shows how rational perception works. Sometimes she suggests that it is the sum of the five senses, which otherwise operate in isolation from each other; rational perception then is the ability to synthesise individual bits of information transmitted by the senses. Concomitantly, rational perception seems to be independent of the senses. It is material, but it is not located in a specific organ, not even in the brain, but inhabits the whole body. Rational perception is in and of the body, but at the same time 'detachable'; it is similar to a 'mind' that is at least partly independent of embodied sensory perception:

Concerning the perception of exterior objects, I will give an instance, where both the rational and sensitive motions do work differently, and not to the same perception: Suppose a man be in a deep contemplative study, and somebody touch or pinch him, it happens oft that he takes no notice at all of it, nor doth feel it; whenas yet his touched or pinched parts are sensible, or have a sensitive perception thereof; [...] which proves, that his mind, or rational motions, work quite to another perception than his sensitive do.<sup>63</sup>

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62 Cavendish, *Observations* 47.

63 Cavendish, *Observations* 150.

It is due to this double system of sensation that Cavendish so easily dismisses the microscope. While the person 'in a deep contemplative study' may not be aware of physical sense impressions, his – or, indeed, her – rational perception allows insight into the finer degrees of matter; in theory at least, it seems, the natural philosopher of Cavendish's ilk has no need of microscopes and telescopes to see invisible worlds.

Cavendish does not admit that the use of microscopes and telescopes results in the discoveries of new worlds; at least, such worlds must necessarily be misshapen. Although she stresses that she could have easy access to microscopes, as the Duke of Newcastle owns 'as good, and as many sorts of optic glasses as anyone else',<sup>64</sup> she also admits that 'I have neither studied nor practised that art'.<sup>65</sup> In *Observations*, she refers to micrography as the activity of others; her knowledge of it is textual: 'Those who have observed through a microscope, the beard of a wild oat, do relate [...]'.<sup>66</sup> Cavendish's rejection of micrography, which stands synechdochically for experimental philosophy in general, is grounded in a deliberate stance of nescience, of non-knowledge, which here takes shape in a refusal to accept the experiment as the only valid 'truth procedure' (*Wahrheitsprozedur*).<sup>67</sup> For example, she reacts with disbelief to 'the strange discovery made by the help of the microscope concerning the great number of eyes observed in flies'.<sup>68</sup> The reason for her scepticism is that nature would not be so wasteful to make thousands of eyes where two are perfectly sufficient; wherefore 'I can hardly believe the truth of this experiment'.<sup>69</sup> This example shows the necessary ambivalence of any evaluation of Cavendish's work. While her critique of a mechanical view of the senses and of nature, closely related to her analysis of the constitutive role of gender in science, earned her a place in recent histories of knowledge influenced by feminism and by the work of Ludwig Fleck, Thomas Kuhn and Bruno Latour, her refusal to accept the epistemic virtues of experimental philosophy also contributed to her marginalisation within contemporary discourses of science.

Cavendish's stance of nescience which she adopts in contrast to the regulated pursuit of knowledge evinced by empiricism pushes her towards a narrativisation of the study of nature. In mini-narratives that pervade the *Observations*,

64 Cavendish, *Observations* 4.

65 Cavendish, *Observations* 50.

66 Cavendish, *Observations* 58.

67 Gamper M., "Experimentelles Nicht-Wissen: Zur poetologischen und epistemologischen Produktivität unsicherer Erkenntnis", in Gamper, *Experiment und Literatur* 511–545, 516.

68 Cavendish, *Observations* 59; see Hooke, *Micrographia* 116.

69 Cavendish, *Observations* 60.

Baconian sensory perception is replaced by an oscillation between observing and turning away. In the place of collective empiricism, Cavendish offers personal narratives centring on herself, the individual observer, who claims epistemological authority and at the same time undermines it by displaying her uncertainty. On one occasion her maid brings her a strange 'shell' (a cocoon) out of which, possibly, two butterflies eclose; or at least, she observes them fluttering close to the broken shell:

But yet this latter I will not certainly affirm, for I could not discern them with my eyes, except I had had some microscope, but a thousand to one I might have been also deceived by it: and had I opened this insect, or shell, at first; it might perhaps have given those butterflies an untimely death, or rather hindered their production. This is all I have observed of butterflies: but I have heard also that caterpillars are transformed into butterflies; whether it be true or not, I will not dispute [...].<sup>70</sup>

In this nonchalant disavowal of experimental drudgery, Cavendish almost wilfully turns the programme of experimental philosophy on its head. If Hooke proclaims that 'the Science of Nature has been already too long made only a work of the Brain and the Fancy: It is now high time that it should return to the plainness and soundness of Observations on material and obvious things',<sup>71</sup> Cavendish on the contrary insists on the light-bearing power of reason and fancy. If the former allows access to the invisible worlds of subtle matter even without the aid of microscopes, the latter enables the human mind to surpass Hooke's rhetoric of discovery and to *make* worlds. Cavendish thus not only repudiates Hooke's mechanical concept of the senses but also reevaluates the speculative faculty cast out from knowledge production by the adherents of experimental philosophy. Historically, speculation or, in Cavendish's word, fancy, would find its proper place in fiction.

### Coda: Science in the Fictions of the Mind

Margaret Cavendish, with her scepticism regarding optical glasses and experimental philosophy in general, positions herself outside the dominant thought collective of her time, whose recognition she simultaneously craves. She is impatient with the newly established methodology and misses out on the

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<sup>70</sup> Cavendish, *Observations* 62.

<sup>71</sup> Hooke, *Micrographia* 4.

epistemic virtues that become more and more crucially a part of the accepted habitus of the scientist: exactitude, detachment, objectivity, modesty, and concomitantly, the exclusion of such apparently unscientific qualities as the imagination. In the contest between two different models of sensory perception, the mechanical perfectibility of the human sense apparatus advocated by Hooke and the rational perception proposed by Cavendish, the former certainly succeeds better in establishing a collective of virtual witnesses. Within the epistemological framework of empiricism, Hooke produces a series of observations which, together with the accompanying illustrations, create a sense of immediate participation for the readers. By contrast, Cavendish's notion of rational perception lacks precisely the sensory concreteness of Hooke's observations. Rejecting the experimental method, she can establish evidence only in the fictional mode.

In fiction, it is precisely the 'detachable' quality of rational perception, its ability to transcend the immediate physical world, that is poietic rather than mimetic. While Cavendish fails to discover new worlds with the help of the microscope, she creates worlds of her own. The publication of *The Blazing World* as an appendix to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* indicates the transition from observation, motivated as well as restricted by the search for truth, to creative world-making, to poiesis. This new world of fancy, in which the Duchess of Newcastle appears as a character who in turn creates a new world 'composed of sensitive and rational self-moving matter',<sup>72</sup> is much more satisfactory than the vertiginous worlds of Descartes or the distorted microscopic worlds of Hooke. The Duchess's world, 'after it was made, appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed, that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own'.<sup>73</sup>

In the realm of fiction, the contest between rivalling epistemological models can be decided by sovereign decree. The tale's heroine, an Empress endowed by her husband with absolute power, demands the country's experimental philosophers, the bear-men, to demonstrate the power of microscopes and telescopes. Because the experiments show all objects in distorted shapes, the incensed Empress commands the bear-men to destroy their optical instruments, these 'false informers':<sup>74</sup> 'The bear-men being exceedingly troubled at her Majesty's displeasure concerning their telescopes, kneeled down, and in the humblest manner petitioned that they might not be broken; for, said they,

72 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 188.

73 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 188.

74 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 141.



we take more delight in artificial delusions, than in natural truths'.<sup>75</sup> Only in the fictions of the mind can experimental philosophers be made to implore the clemency of an omnipotent woman; and only in the fantastic country of Cavendish's imagination can collective empiricism be overturned so simply, by the decree of the philosophical '*Margaret the First*'.<sup>76</sup>

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75 Cavendish, *Blazing World* 142.

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# Hierarchies of Vision in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Tobias Gabel

## Milton's Two Hierarchies of Vision

In the historical study of the senses, discussion of 'hierarchies' most often comes in the context of a hierarchised sensorium, a conception of the senses according to which a given sense – in a Western context, usually sight – is prioritised as more worthy, indeed more trustworthy than the others.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will sketch a different kind of sensorial hierarchy and attempt an analysis of the multiple and hierarchised senses of vision in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667).<sup>2</sup>

The case for such an analysis can be made succinctly. There are three main classes of perceiving agents within the cosmology of Milton's epic: humans (a class limited, on the story level, to Adam and Eve, although I will also consider Milton's extradiegetic narrator as a kind of 'limiting' or extreme case of human perception); angels (including the fallen angels or devils, another 'limiting case', this time of angelic perception); and God.<sup>3</sup> These classes, as well as their individual members, may be said to constitute a hierarchy, quite literally a 'holy order' of Creation. At the same time, they constitute a hierarchy of *vision*. As Jens Martin Gurr shows in his contribution to this volume, Milton was prone

1 For a concise account of the pre-eminence of vision in the traditional Western hierarchy of the senses, see Jütte R., *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. J. Lynn (Cambridge: 2005) 61–66.

2 Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow: 2007). All further references to *Paradise Lost* (PL), given by book and line number, are to this edition.

3 By 'limiting cases' of perception, I mean those representations of perceptive agency in the poem which are characterised by either atypically and extremely high or atypically and extremely deficient perceptivity (as, for instance, in the cases of Milton's blind narrator or of Uriel, 'sharpest sighted spirit of all in heaven', PL 3.691). In mathematics, where the concept originates, limiting cases which can by virtue of their extreme properties be described in terms of a 'lower' (i.e., less complex or less specific) class of objects are known, in a rather Miltonic turn of phrase, as 'degenerate cases'. Evidently, the perceptual degeneracy of some of Milton's characters (most obviously the fallen angels) is just an outward symptom of their spiritual and moral degeneracy, but it is equally expressive of their 'collective degeneracy' as members of a class of degenerate (limiting) cases in a clearly structured perceptual hierarchy.

to use the established notion of a 'hierarchy of the senses' in new contexts, not least as part of the political commentary interspersed throughout *Paradise Lost*.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, arguments from vision, presented in different forms throughout the poem, inform both Milton's poetics (for instance through the rhetoric of inspired insight adopted by the poem's vatic speaker) and his theology.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Milton defines, compares, and contrasts his characters with reference to their collective and individual visual powers.

In order to do justice to the complexity of Milton's model, it is necessary to introduce a further distinction, namely that between *physical* sight or vision on the one hand – that is to say, the faculty of visual perception in space and time – and *spiritual* sight or vision on the other, by which traditionally is meant the capacity to perceive with 'the eyes of the understanding'.<sup>6</sup> The interplay between these two modes of visual perception, their similarities and incongruities, are crucial to Milton's delineation of his characters and their respective functions in the development of the 'argument' of *Paradise Lost*. The excellence – and full convergence – of the two modes is a divine attribute, meaning that only God possesses both faculties equally, and in equal perfection. Consequently, it finds its foil in the various shortcomings of the poem's human and angelic characters.

In my essay, I will trace this fourfold distinction – between different categories of perceiving agents on the one hand, different modes of visual perception on the other – in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>7</sup> Although my main concern is with Milton, I will also refer to a treatise on the appropriate use of the eyes in Christian devotion entitled *Divine Opticks* and published by the Presbyterian minister Robert Dingley in 1654.<sup>8</sup> As Dingley himself explains in his preface,

4 Cf. Gurr J.M., "The Senses and Human Nature in a Political Reading of *Paradise Lost*", in this volume.

5 Here, one could point to Milton's repeated characterisation of angels as 'God's eyes', for instance at *PL* 3.650; to his frequent identification of God and light, first made explicit in the proem to Book III (*PL* 3.3); or to the decidedly ocular imagery applied to the Son in Book VI.

6 Cf. Eph. 1:18 KJV. For a concise introduction to the Christian spiritual senses tradition, see Coakley S. – Gavriluk P.L. (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: 2012). Gordon Rudy has traced its manifestations in late medieval literature (*Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* [New York: 2002]).

7 In this essay, I am focusing on roughly the first half of the poem. A full analysis would have to take into account, among other aspects, Adam's experience of *visio beatifica* in Book VIII, as well as his revelation of future events in Book XI, both episodes ending in a kind of sensory overload.

8 Dingley Robert, *Divine Opticks, or, A Treatise of the Eye, Discovering the Vices and Virtues Thereof; as Also How That Organ May Be Tuned* (London, J.M. for H. Cripps and L. Lloyd: 1654).

he had written 'a Treatise of spiritual Opticks, discovering the infirmities of the eye by Nature, with its excellencies attainable by Grace'.<sup>9</sup> While Dingley's discussion of the role of the eye in the context of faith shares a number of concerns with Milton's narrative approach to the same theme, their differences will become equally clear.

### Human Sight and Adam's 'Imperious Gaze'

Given the framing of the poem by means of a quasi-authorial blind speaker, one might say that human sight in *Paradise Lost* is, fundamentally, deficient sight. When the speaker renews his plea for divine inspiration at the end of the proem to Book III, he does not ask to see anything specific; rather, what he desires to see is defined through reference to its fundamental unavailability under 'normal', non-inspired conditions:

So much the rather thou celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.<sup>10</sup>

Even apart from the speaker's own vision impairment, these words, spoken from a postlapsarian point of view, presuppose a more general fallibility: by now, it has become clear that 'the five watchful senses',<sup>11</sup> as Adam represents them to Eve, are neither undeceivable nor unassailable. What remains, however, is the Father's promise, made in Book III, to

[...] once more [...] renew  
His lapsèd powers [i.e., man's senses], though forfeit and enthralled  
By sin to foul exorbitant desires [...],<sup>12</sup>

followed by a pledge to 'clear their senses dark' 'while offered grace / Invites'.<sup>13</sup> By virtue of its connection with salvation, the kind of improvement of vision promised here to postlapsarian humanity is manifestly not on the same level

9 Dingley, *Divine Opticks* A2<sup>v</sup>.

10 *PL* 3.51–55.

11 *PL* 5.104.

12 *PL* 3.175–177.

13 *PL* 3.187f.

as the kind attained by means of improved optical equipment such as the 'optic glass' or 'glazed optic tube' mentioned at different points in the poem.<sup>14</sup> '[W]hile offered grace / Invites', even 'the Tuscan artist' appearing in Book I, Galileo, is looking 'through a glass, darkly'.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to this negative portrayal of human vision as lacking, the first references made in the poem to vision as experienced by Adam and – to a lesser extent – Eve appear to assert the excellence of human sight. From their hill-top garden, Adam is given 'prospect large / Into his nether empire neighbouring round'.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, this aspect of human visual *agency* (as opposed to mere contemplation) is first introduced as a kind of quality *in the landscape*, stressing the particular, literally *commanding* place of human vision in the general scheme of creation. When, some lines later, Adam first comes into Satan's view, Milton restates his point less subtly: 'His [i.e., Adam's] fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule'.<sup>17</sup> It is not before Book VII, however, that Milton reveals the full rationale behind this design. As God's 'master-work', Raphael explains to Adam, man is 'a creature who'

[...] endued  
With sanctity of reason, might erect  
His stature, and upright with front serene  
Govern the rest, self-knowing [...].<sup>18</sup>

One defining aspect of human sight, then, – and, indeed, one of its purposes within the larger scope of creation – is that it is fundamentally *imperious*. For Adam, seeing is not only a receptive activity; it is also an act of governing directed at the world around and below. In the lines immediately following the passage just quoted, Milton makes it clear that this imperious gaze cannot rightfully be separated from its employment in prayer and adoration, an

14 PL 1.288 and 3.590, respectively. These passages attest to Milton's fascination with telescopes and astronomy, on which see Nicolson M., "Milton and the Telescope", *English Literary History* 2 (1935) 1–32, and, more recently, Boesky A., "Milton, Galileo and Sunspots: Optics and Certainty in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Studies* 34 (1996) 23–42.

15 PL 1.288; 1. Cor. 13:12. For a synopsis of the research into Milton's assumed encounter with Galileo in 1638/39, see the discussion and notes in Friedman D., "Galileo and the Art of Seeing", in Di Cesare M.A. (ed.), *Milton in Italy* (Binghamton: 1991) 159–174.

16 PL 4.144f.

17 PL 4.300f.

18 PL 7.505–510.

activity shared by humans and angels. On the basis of this divinely ordained rule, Raphael continues, it is man's duty

[...] from thence  
Magnanimous to correspond with heaven,  
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good  
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes  
Directed in devotion, to adore  
And worship God supreme, who made him chief  
Of all his works [...].<sup>19</sup>

This line of argument is not altogether alien to the wider seventeenth-century discussion, and will be taken up below. For the time being, it is important to realise that the privilege and the obligation – the right to rule and the duty to adore – are given equal weight as constituents of human nature, expressive of an innate urge to explore the world through visual perception.

By way of explanation, Milton grounds his passage in anatomical evidence. In this, he is not alone. As Robert Dingley points out in his *Divine Opticks*, in a curious appropriation of physiological argument for teleo-theological ends, '[t]he Lord made our eyes to look upwards, and hath given mans eye one muscle that the beasts have not; to shew that our eyes should be lifted up to himself in prayer'.<sup>20</sup> In Dingley's physio-theology, one is tempted to say, Adam's imperious gaze comes with built-in anti-pride protection. Human vision may have been designed to rule, but its very design compels humans to acknowledge their absolute superior. Tellingly Milton, in whose *narrative* design any such protective mechanism is bound to fail, makes no claims about an anatomical safeguard against a possible failure of Adam's imperious gaze.

In his portrayal of Adam surveying his empire, Milton presents human vision at its most powerful. As a particularly striking instance of the *frailty* of human sight, Milton's blind speaker is posited at the opposite end of the spectrum of human visual agency. At the same time, the speaker's proem to Book III introduces into the poem the crucial notion of spiritual sight, and on several occasions, he contrasts the relative merits and shortcomings of his (lost) eyesight and the inner light – and inner sight – he has gained courtesy of divine inspiration. 'Thus', on the one hand,

19 *PL* 7.510–516.

20 Dingley, *Divine Opticks* 64.

with the year  
 Seasons return, but not to me returns  
 Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,  
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine [...].<sup>21</sup>

Yet, by virtue of his request for inspiration, the speaker does not fully belong to – is not hopelessly limited to – the weak (and in his case, practically impotent) scope of merely human vision. Though 'human face divine' is lost to him, he is propelled by the hope of divine revelation. His blindness, in conjunction with a plea for inspiration couched in downright anatomical terms ('there plant eyes'), underlines the fact that for Milton, physical and spiritual sight are structurally similar, yet effectively distinct faculties. One step up Milton's visual hierarchy, this notion is reiterated and refined.

### Angelic Vision, Satanic Vision, and the 'Argument from Creation'

For Milton, as might be expected, angelic vision is superior to human vision in a number of respects. On the one hand, Milton presents his angels' visual perception as exceedingly sharp. Even after his downfall, Satan views 'as far as angels' ken',<sup>22</sup> and this despite the unfavourable circumstances presented by hell, where there is '[n]o light, but rather darkness visible'.<sup>23</sup> In their usual 'optical habitat', Milton's angels possess visual powers that are proportionately greater, which indicates that not even their sight is perfect in itself, but depends for its full realisation on a sufficiently conducive environment.

One such 'sensescape' germane to angelic vision is 'the pure empyrean'<sup>24</sup> of heaven, where it is never completely dark<sup>25</sup> and the highest-ranking angels 'stand / In sight of God's high throne, gloriously bright'.<sup>26</sup> Here it becomes obvious that it is also the *objects* of angelic vision that transcend those of human sensory experience. There are limits to this transcendence, however, and not

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21 *PL* 3.40–44.

22 *PL* 1.59. Meaning, we may assume, 'very far'.

23 *PL* 1.63.

24 *PL* 3.57. The notion of transparency of both the *organon* and medium as *the* fundamental prerequisite of visual perception goes back to Aristotle's discussion in *De anima* (see Johansen T.K., *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs* [Cambridge: 1998] 114f., 282).

25 See *PL* 6.11f.

26 *PL* 3.654f.



even Milton's angels have unfiltered ocular experience of the Deity, who, '[d]ark with excessive bright [...] / [...] dazzle[s] heaven, that brightest seraphim / Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes'.<sup>27</sup>

The other emphatically optical environment in *Paradise Lost*, if a this-worldly one, is the surface of the sun, which Milton also associates with the angels. In addition, and in keeping with traditional Christian symbolism, Milton frequently refers to the sun as a kind of worldly stand-in for God in his various capacities as a monarch, creator, and giver of light. When Satan arrives on the solar surface towards the end of Book III, he encounters ideal optical surroundings:

Here matter new to gaze the devil met  
Undazzled, far and wide his eye commands,  
For sight no obstacle found here, nor shade,  
But all sunshine, [...]  
[...] whence no way round  
Shadow from body opaque can fall, and the air,  
Nowhere so clear, sharpened his visual ray  
To objects distant far [...].<sup>28</sup>

The choice of words is telling: where the brightness of God had 'dazzle[d] heaven', the rays of the sun – 'undazzl[ing]' – present no such challenge, not even to Satan's 'fallen' eyes, and not even at their very source. In this luminous setting, which nonetheless is only *implicitly* supernatural due to its symbolic association with the Deity, Satan meets the archangel Uriel ('Light of God'),<sup>29</sup> who is, as God's local representative, 'regent of the sun, and held / The sharpest sighted spirit of all in heaven'.<sup>30</sup> In Uriel, then, three factors combine: angelic vision, the visual advantage of his solar surroundings, and his individual sharp-sightedness.<sup>31</sup> Uriel is at the very apex of the angelic visual hierarchy, yet even he fails to detect Satan's subsequent deception:

<sup>27</sup> *PL* 3.380–382.

<sup>28</sup> *PL* 3.613–621.

<sup>29</sup> Thus the etymology of the name given by Fowler in his note *ad PL* 3.648; 'God is my light' seems a more literal rendering.

<sup>30</sup> *PL* 3.690f.

<sup>31</sup> On the interplay of these factors, see also *PL* 4.576–579: 'To whom [Gabriel] thus returned: / Uriel, no wonder if thy perfect sight, / Amid the sun's bright circle where thou sitst, / See far and wide'.

So spake the false dissembler unperceived;  
 For neither man nor angel can discern  
 Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks  
 Invisible, except to God alone,  
 By his permissive will, through heaven and earth [...].<sup>32</sup>

This authorial comment not only points to God's position at the summit of the visual hierarchy; it also presupposes, just like the speaker's plea for inspiration at the beginning of Book III, the mutual independence of physical and spiritual vision. In the proem, this fact had taken on a reassuring quality: even if physical sight fails, grace (and hence spiritual insight) may still be available. Now, in the final episode of Book III, Milton dramatises the negative side of that separation of faculties. Even near-perfect (physical) sight does not guarantee infallible judgement in spiritual matters; even in conjunction with unquestioned goodness, angelic vision can at best amount to an approximation of absolute vision, physical as well as spiritual, which is an attribute of God alone; even Uriel, 'Light of God', but less than divine, may be misled. Milton, in what could be described as a distinctly ocular variation on the overarching theme of Book III,<sup>33</sup> thus presents the most explicit statement of his dualistic conception of vision.

As with the blind speaker and human sight, *Paradise Lost* also contains a kind of limiting case for angelic vision, and, again, the situation is caused by visual impairment. Those afflicted are the fallen angels, who, as I have mentioned, at first do not seem to have lost any of their visual acuity. Yet their spiritual sight has failed them.

Milton makes this failure explicit in commenting on Satan's faulty use both of his eyes and of divine grace as represented in creation immediately after his entry into the Garden in Book IV: sitting on the Tree of Life, the highest tree in the Garden, Satan 'only used / For prospect, what well used had been the pledge / of immortality'.<sup>34</sup> Having found the perfect lookout to spy on Adam and Eve, Satan fails to recognise what is directly under his feet.

Earlier in the poem, Satan had made a first step towards an 'unlawful appropriation' of the imperious gaze then associated with Adam, the fallen angel

32 PL 3.681–685.

33 Isabel G. MacCaffrey has plausibly suggested this theme to be 'divine epistemology, the ways whereby men can know, or come to know, God' ('The Theme of *Paradise Lost*, Book III" in Kranidas T. [ed.], *New Essays on "Paradise Lost"* [Berkeley: 1971] 58–85, at 58).

34 PL 4.199–201.

'[l]ook[ing] down with wonder at the sudden view / Of all this world at once',<sup>35</sup> but it is not his to rule. His looking is not in concordance with the telos of his eyes, which should be looking up in adoration. Satan is manifestly lacking in the pious reverence that should be his proper occupation (in this Dingley and Milton are in agreement), an occupation which, in Dingley's account, is indissolubly connected with the occasion of the imperious gaze: 'In your gardens, in your Corn-fields, by the Sea-shore, and on the high Mountains (*where your eye hath a brave and large Prospect*,) there let out your hearts in meditation'.<sup>36</sup> The 'large prospect' referenced by both Dingley and Milton<sup>37</sup> is, all at once, the occasion, the medium, and the reward of pious reverence by means of the 'imperious gaze'. Where this trinity of ocular adoration breaks down, something is amiss.

While Dingley seems to promote a somewhat fragmentary 'mechanistic' approach to this complex – he never discusses the possible role of the 'muscle that the beasts have not' in the event of malfunction –, Milton makes the successful interplay of creation and perception conditional on the individual free will. By way of consequence, Satan perched on the Tree of Life (and already, one might say, using faulty equipment), makes matters worse by *choice*, and his subsequent envy – *invidia*, 'malicious looking' – springs solely from his own corrupted mind.

Adam and Eve, in Satan's eyes nothing but '[t]he puny [i.e., later-born] habitants'<sup>38</sup> of the newly created world, are his superiors when it comes to perceiving God in creation, as is attested most strikingly by their evening and morning prayers in Books iv and v. Both these prayers are very much in keeping with the Christian 'argument from Creation', which has its canonical expression in the Epistle to the Romans. 'For the *invisible* things of him from the creation of the world *are clearly seen*, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead', Paul writes, and goes on, 'so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened'.<sup>39</sup>

35 *PL* 3.542f.

36 Dingley, *Divine Opticks* 79, emphasis in the original.

37 In *PL* 4.144, as cited above.

38 *PL* 2.367.

39 Rom. 1:20f. KJV, my emphasis. Dingley discusses these verses in *Divine Opticks* 74–77. In the original Greek, the paradox is brought out more clearly, the crucial terms for 'invisible' and 'are clearly seen' stemming from the same verb root, *ὁρᾶν*, 'to see': 'τὰ γὰρ

The first part of this passage is rephrased by Milton in Adam's assumption that '[i]n contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God',<sup>40</sup> while the case of Satan could be said to constitute Milton's narrative elaboration of its latter part. True to Paul's archetypal description of spiritual blindness, Satan remains 'in the dark'. Even in the sun, a place of ideal – if worldly – optics, he does not recognise his Creator, and that in spite of the fact that, as Milton hints several times, the sun is the most obvious signifier of the divine signified. In the case of Satan's former peer, Uriel, proper 'optical' and proper 'spiritual' vision find their exemplary, if not infallible, amalgamation. That they should not be confused or taken to be necessarily concomitant is made clear through the negative example given by Satan and the other fallen angels. Uriel could only act against Satan's disguise in hindsight; Satan seems to possess not even that – or rather, when he does seem to possess it (during the soliloquy on Mount Niphates at the beginning of Book IV) he consciously chooses to reject it.

Earlier in the poem, the fallen angels' rejection of God had been phrased in notably ocular terms. When, towards the end of Book I, the multitudes of fallen angels report to their leader, Satan, they do so 'with looks / Downcast and damp'.<sup>41</sup> This may be taken as indicating a general feeling of dejection among Satan's troops. However, as Milton makes clear, these looks are expressive of a disposition antecedent to the rebel angels' recent downfall. This disposition, which could be termed 'materialist' at only a slight risk of anachronism,<sup>42</sup> is especially prominent in Mammon,

[...] the least erected spirit that fell  
From heaven, for even in heaven *his looks and thoughts*

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ἀόρατα [...] νοούμενα καθορᾶται' (cited from *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. E. Nestle – K. Aland, 27th ed. [Stuttgart: 2001], my emphasis).

40 PL 5.511f. On the wider relevance of this idea in the context of early modern natural philosophy, see Marjara H.S., *Contemplation of Created Things: Science in "Paradise Lost"* (Toronto: 1992) 289–299.

41 PL 1.522f.

42 The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first appearance of the noun, 'materialist', ('an adherent of materialism') to 1668 (the year after *Paradise Lost* was first published), citing the 'Cambridge Platonist' Henry More. In the second citation (from More's philosophical ally Ralph Cudworth), dated 1678, the full contemporary implications of the term, equally applicable, it could be argued, to Milton's Mammon, become apparent: 'The Old *Atheistick* Materialists' (my emphasis) would not have agreed with Milton's brand of 'animist materialism' (cf. Fallon S.M., *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* [Ithaca: 1991]).

Were always downward bent, admiring more  
 The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,  
 Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed  
 In vision beatific [. . .].<sup>43</sup>

Milton's 'vision beatific' is the *visio beatifica* promised to the saved by Christian doctrine, but, according to angelology, already enjoyed by angels due to their permanent standing '[i]n sight of God's high throne, gloriously bright',<sup>44</sup> as Milton puts it. Dingley describes the experience as 'the beatifical vision of Christ, not only with the eyes of our mind, but even our bodily organs, which shall be piercing and strong like the eyes of Eagles, delightfully to behold the Sun of Righteousness' as well as 'the happiness of the eye, in our state of Perfection'.<sup>45</sup> To reject this perfect spiritual gift in favour of material splendour, as Mammon does, is, in itself, a striking act of ungratefulness. The downcast looks of the fallen angels only serve to illustrate their impenitence. After all, as Dingley explains, lifting one's eyes up to Heaven might per se be considered a kind of silent prayer; the eyes being 'the means of craving [God's] help, by the still, yet most rhetorical, language, of *eyes lifted up*; especially, if the heart be lifted up with them',<sup>46</sup> just as Milton's Adam and Eve are supposed to adore God 'with heart and voice and eyes / Directed in devotion'.<sup>47</sup>

In this context of spiritual blindness and averted eyes, then, Satan's doubly ironic claim of being '[i]n arms not worse, in foresight much advanced'<sup>48</sup>

43 PL 1.679–684, my emphasis.

44 PL 3.655. Cf. also 3.60–62: 'About him all the sanctities of heaven / Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received / Beatitude past utterance'.

45 *Divine Opticks* 86, my emphasis. For a (by and large equivalent) Catholic statement of the doctrine, see bk. 4 ch. 5, "Of the Joy of the Eyes" in Bellarmine Robert, *Of the Eternal Felicitie of the Saints* (Saint-Omer, Widow of C. Boscard?: 1638) 269–273. It is the very potentiality of this physical-spiritual continuum of ocular perception which later breaks down – or rather: is dissolved with drastic immediacy – in Kleist's *Prince of Homburg* (1809/10, pr. 1821): 'Ah, well, they say the sun shines up there too / And over brighter fields than we have here. / I believe that's true: a pity that the eye should rot / Before it can glimpse those wonders ---' ('nur schade, daß das Auge modert, das diese Herrlichkeit erblicken soll', trans. J. Kirkup, in: *Two German Drama Classics* [Salzburg: 1996] 53). In Kleist, the dissolution of the '*visio beatifica realis*' in the grave signals scepticism and perhaps even that loss of faith deplored by Paul. Dingley's conception ('even our bodily organs') constitutes the other extreme of the spectrum.

46 *Divine Opticks* 64, emphasis in the original.

47 PL 7.513f.

48 PL 1.119.

must be read as an instance of Milton's at times rather grim humour. The fallen angels have neither *learnt* anything from their catastrophe (and throughout the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, Milton goes to great lengths to expose their delusions), nor have they improved their standing in the eye of divine providence.

As in the case of Satan perched on the Tree of Life, availing himself of the view while disavowing 'the bigger picture', Milton presents the reader with an incongruity of physical and spiritual vision. In Milton's account of Mammon's 'looks and thoughts [...] downward bent', the latter evidently form an interiorised parallel to the former. Yet while Mammon's 'downward' looks serve to discover the riches from which Pandaemonium is built, his correspondingly low thoughts will, in the long run, only precipitate the fallen angels' utter ruin. Again, the actual problem is posed by the pragmatic dimension of *how* a given agent's eyes are employed. The precise cause of this particular instance of 'malicious looking' remains ambiguous, although it is to be suspected that Milton locates it, too, in the individual will (as later made explicit in Satan's speech on the top of Mount Niphates). In a kind of downward spiral, a faulty decision like Satan's influences the visual powers themselves. Thus, Satan seems to be subject to considerable deterioration even in his physical visual capacity. When reviewing his troops, shortly after having viewed 'as far as angels' ken', he '[d]arts his experienced eye';<sup>49</sup> when he is about to reach 'this world' on his journey from hell to paradise at the beginning of Book III, his '[u]ncertain' vision is contrasted, by a sudden cut in the narrative, with the all-seeing eye of God.<sup>50</sup>

### The Divine Eye and Inspired Human Vision

It is in this situation of Satan's visual uncertainty that God the Father makes his first appearance in the poem, an appearance which itself is closely linked to his vision. The attribution to God of sense faculties was a theological proposition well grounded in scriptural precedent,<sup>51</sup> although from early on this had been interpreted 'in a spiritual sense', i.e. as one of the four senses of scripture recognised by traditional hermeneutics, through what was known as an

49 *PL* 1.568.

50 *PL* 3.74, 76.

51 Cf. Avrahami Y., *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: 2012).

'accommodation' of spiritual realities to the human understanding.<sup>52</sup> So in the 1642 account of Richard Bernard, God 'is said to *Heare*. by which is meant That he accomplisheth mans request', '*See*. [...] That he knoweth all things that are done', '*Smell*. by which is meant His acceptation of mans doings', and so forth.<sup>53</sup> In Book V of *Paradise Lost*, Milton expressly addresses this problem in the context of Raphael's visit in the bower,<sup>54</sup> but in Book III, which from its proem is concerned with matters of light and vision, the artificiality (or metaphorical nature) of this manner of speaking is not yet made explicit, and in the passage in question, the Father is presented as just one more character of the poem, using the superior vantage point of his heavenly throne to inspect his Creation:<sup>55</sup>

Now had the almighty Father from above,  
From the pure empyrean where he sits  
High throned above all height, bent down his eye,  
His own works and their works at once to view [...].<sup>56</sup>

Looking down, he sees Satan and, '[h]im [...] beholding from his prospect high, / Wherein past, present, future he beholds, / Thus to his only son foreseeing spake'.<sup>57</sup>

This introductory passage already contains a number of key aspects of divine vision present in *Paradise Lost*, none of which, admittedly, are unique to Milton's epic: God's vision extends infinitely in both time and space; it is the true basis of his omniscience. What is unique, however, is the way in which they fit into – and integrate – Milton's exposition of two distinct strands of physical and spiritual vision. At the same time, divine vision in *Paradise Lost*

52 Cf. Patrides C.A., "Paradise Lost and the Theory of Accommodation", in Hunter W.B. – Patrides C.A. – Adamson J.H. (eds.), *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: 1973) 159–163.

53 Bernard Richard, *The Bibles Abstract and Epitomie* (London, G.M. for Andrew Crooke: 1642) 3.

54 Accommodation theory is discussed in *PL* 5.563–576 by Raphael, who deems accommodation a '[s]ad task and hard' (at 564). Arguably, Milton thus stresses the insufficiency of accommodation, whatever the effort.

55 As Charlotte Clutterbuck has argued, '[t]he insistence on visual details suggests forcibly', in this passage already, 'the folly and *hubris* of attempting to depict "things invisible to mortal sight"' (*Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* [Aldershot: 2005] 159).

56 *PL* 3.56–59.

57 *PL* 3.77–79.

is truly multi-functional, as the Father uses it to pity, judge,<sup>58</sup> bless, receive thanks and obedience; it is a bidirectional channel of communication between the Creator and his creation: 'To prayer, repentance, and obedience due, / [...] / Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut'.<sup>59</sup> When the Father addresses the Son as 'thou in whom my glory I behold / In full resplendence',<sup>60</sup> God even seems to reflect among the persons of the Trinity the kind of fundamentally ocular veneration offered him by Adam, Eve and the loyal angels, the Son acting as a mirror to the Father.<sup>61</sup>

These last two aspects – intra-Trinitarian reflection and extra-Trinitarian communicative action – illustrate an important point about God's vision in *Paradise Lost*: it is self-sufficient, yet extends to all of creation. In viewing everything, all of the time, never losing sight of Creation, he at the same time remains in view, is never far away – a circumstance that acquires an oppressive quality only after the Fall. Milton's account suggests, moreover, that the dual model of physical and spiritual sight that I have outlined cannot, strictly speaking, be applied to God himself. Seeing 'all things at once' while at the same time 'looking into the hearts of men', he is all eye in the sense of fusing both these activities in a perfect, physical and moral gaze. An essentially ocular deity, Milton's God inhabits the apex of both hierarchies, or rather: both hierarchies converge in Him.

The rebellious angels seem fully aware of the absolute superiority of the all-seeing eye. As Belial points out,

[...] what can force or guile  
With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye  
Views all things at one view? He from heaven's height  
All these our motions vain, sees and derides [...].<sup>62</sup>

However, the fallen angels remain unaware of the fact that omniscient, omnipresent, almighty, God is not only the end, the terminus of seeing – 'invisible /

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58 On the further evolution of this aspect of the divine eye into an abstract 'eye of the law', see the title essay in Stolleis M., *The Eye of the Law: Two Essays on Legal History*, trans. T. Dunlap (Abingdon: 2009 [2004]) 1–52.

59 *PL* 3.191–193.

60 *PL* 5.719f.

61 While of course God cannot worship himself in the same way Adam and Eve do, paternal affection and filial reverence – both phrased in ocular terms – form the intra-Trinitarian equivalents of human devotion to the Deity.

62 *PL* 2.188–191.



[...], / Dark with excessive bright'<sup>63</sup> –; but that he is also the end of seeing in the sense that, in the poetic universe of *Paradise Lost*, all true insight should finally, ideally, converge into knowledge of him.

This true insight into the reality of the divine sphere is personified in the poem by the 'heavenly Muse' first invoked by Milton's speaker six lines into Book I. To Milton, this muse – arguably the Holy Spirit that prefers '[b]efore all temples the upright heart and pure'<sup>64</sup> – expresses an aspect of the Trinity, and may be seen as the most obvious manifestation of Milton's double rootedness in both the Biblical and classical traditions. As such, the Spirit is equipped with privileged vision – 'for heaven hides nothing from thy view / Nor the deep tract of hell'<sup>65</sup> –, and the aim of the speaker's incantation is to be granted, *temporally*, a hybrid kind of vision, in which divine insight and human perception are interconnected – 'a vision', too, in the sense of a revelation or an epiphany.<sup>66</sup> Granted 'Godly vision' for a limited amount of time, the speaker again constitutes a limiting case for human sight, this time at the joint boundary between physical/spiritual vision and divine omniperceptivity. A kind of 'inspired cyborg', he invites contrastive comparison with the often negative reactions of contemporaries to other auxiliary media of (physical) perception.<sup>67</sup>

### Milton's Flexible Hierarchies of Vision

As this survey indicates, Milton's conception of the two distinct modes of seeing consistently referenced in *Paradise Lost* cannot truly be accounted for by a static model of 'visual hierarchy' as it is suggested by the notion of a fixed 'holy order'. To be sure, the three individual classes of perceiving agents present in the poem are distinguished by their visual powers and may be classed according to a hierarchical configuration. In addition, a full analysis of the role of vision in *Paradise Lost* would have to take into account the fact that they are also distinguished by their *preferred modes* of looking at the world they inhabit

63 *PL* 3.375–380.

64 *PL* 1.18.

65 *PL* 1.27f.

66 Both of these terms are connected to vision etymologically, as the 'removal of a veil' and a 'coming into light', respectively.

67 On the use and representation of spectacles, commonly associated with the devil due to their 'unnatural' (and thus ungodly) intrusion upon the seeing process, see Cambers A., *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: 2011) 67, n. 114.

(for example, with 'adoring' or 'envious' looks). These various preferences may, but do not necessarily, coincide with the modes of vision presented as *ideally appropriate* for them. Even if angels and humans do not share the same acuity of physical or spiritual vision, their eyes have a shared telos in an actual – or eventual – *visio beatifica*.

However, none of these categories prevent Milton from drawing on changes in his characters' visual powers in the narrative unfolding of his argument. At the same time, the relationship between the different modes of seeing in evidence is a complex one. In Milton's visual poetics, the corresponding tropes employed to portray the development of his characters' physical and spiritual sight, respectively, both play crucial roles, and may be shown to be interdependent (as in the case of the 'argument from Creation'). This suggests their connection, yet does not imply conflation. Thus, while in individual situations any combination of those aspects – ideal and actual, physical and spiritual vision – may be foregrounded, their full significance arises from Milton's contrastive juxtaposition of one with the other. Hence, 'Milton's optics' *are* his 'divine optics' in that he shows them to serve a distinct metaphysical function within the framework of Creation as a whole. Still, he never goes as far as Dingley, who, through his reference to the 'one muscle that the beasts have not',<sup>68</sup> effects a rather peculiar fusion of the 'literal' (that is, in this case, physical-physiological) functioning of the sense of vision with its teleo-theological (and hence 'tropological' or moral) interpretation. Dingley thus posits a unified, if polysemous, sensorium firmly 'grounded' within the order of creation – and quite in tune with contemporary arguments for an empiricist study of nature. While Milton also discusses the distinct properties of, and relationship between, physical and spiritual sight (and blindness) at length, he does so on a more abstract level, which enables him to construct significant test cases, albeit speculative and non-physical ones.

In *Paradise Lost*, there are at least two such cases in which Milton further complicates the role of vision, to the effect that there is no straightforward, complete correspondence between the visual hierarchy and the general hierarchy of Creation. The first instance of this kind of 'problematic vision' is presented by the poem's blind speaker and his temporary divine vision; the second, by the failing spiritual vision of the fallen angels, and of Satan in particular. Just as the devils – despite being apparently still more sharp-sighted than the average human – do not realise the full potential of their once angelic vision (whose true telos now is more closely approached by the eyes of Adam and Eve lifted in prayer), the speaker's vision is both less and more than human: even with 'wisdom at one entrance quite shut out', he is able through inspiration to

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68 *Divine Opticks* 64.

see 'things invisible to mortal sight'.<sup>69</sup> Both instances serve to illustrate that physical and spiritual sight are precarious possessions, liable to defects and corruption – yet equally capable (and therein lies the comfort of Milton's narrator) of independent improvement, effected by the 'offered grace' promised in Book III.

This also means that Milton's visual hierarchy, if conditioned initially by the conventional notion of a hierarchic sensorium, and feeding back into it, never becomes identical with it. If Milton's Father is 'all eye', and the sun, 'of this great world both eye and soul',<sup>70</sup> this is meant to characterise both God and the sun as supreme, at the same time as it serves to elevate vision above all other senses. In the triadic identification of sun, God, and sight, Milton effects a 'triple enthronement' at the respective apices of the three parallel hierarchies of Creation, vision (both physical and spiritual), and perception in general. Together, the three constituents of this extended metaphor of 'divine epistemology'<sup>71</sup> form the absolute to which all physical and spiritual (in)sight can only aspire.

Placed well below this absolute level of immaculate perception, Milton's characters are not, however, *bound* to their respective places. The visual hierarchies they inhabit integrate categorial pre-ordination and individual development. Over the course of the poem, Milton's characters navigate (as in the case of Satan) between physical clairvoyance and spiritual myopia, between remorseful insight and 'uncertain' vision. It is this movement of perceiving agents up or down the scales of spiritual and physical vision – and indeed the movement of the narrative focus back and forth between the two hierarchies –, which opens up the space for Milton's theology of vision to be developed in the first place. In the most striking instances of this movement, perceiving agents cannot without reservation be assigned to a single level on the hierarchy of perception: they have either worked their way up or down the ladder.

It is in these limiting cases (such as the inspired narrator or the fallen angels) that Milton's use of the hierarchy of vision is most creative. While Robert Dingley, for instance, perpetuates a simpler dichotomy, pitting 'the infirmities of the eye by Nature' against 'its excellencies attainable by Grace', Milton's rather more complex treatment of physical and spiritual vision transforms the two categories into productive instruments of theological deliberation rather than expressions of any fixed epistemological doctrine.

69 PL 3.50, 55. Even though the passage is constructed so as to demonstrate the superiority of spiritual vision, Milton manages to convey a poignant feeling of loss at the fact that the speaker *cannot* see the 'things *visible* to mortal sight'.

70 PL 5.171.

71 See n. 33 above.

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**PART 3**

*The Perilous Senses*





## Strange Perceptions: Sensory Experience in the Old English “Marvels of the East”

Dieter Bitterli

The early medieval prose treatise known as *The Marvels of the East* or *The Wonders of the East* is an eclectic catalogue of exotic plants, legendary animals, oriental races and purported monsters, ‘ranging from rams as big as oxen to dog-headed men’, and deriving from a group of classical *mirabilia* texts known from late antiquity.<sup>1</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, both the Latin version and a vernacular translation of *The Marvels of the East* were known. Together with the related *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the Old English text was copied towards the end of the tenth century into the “Beowulf” manuscript (British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fols. 98v–106v), but two more versions of it survive from early England: British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B.v (early eleventh c., with a Latin and Old English text), and Oxford, MS Bodleian 614 (mid twelfth c., Latin only).<sup>2</sup> In all three of them, the text of the *Marvels* is fully illustrated, and the often spectacular depictions in the elaborate Tiberius manuscript, in particular, have attracted considerable attention in recent years, generating a growing body of literature focussing, for the most part, on the *Marvels*’ negotiation of cultural deviance and the monstrous.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Orchard A., “Marvels of the East”, in Lapidge M. et al. (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: 1999) 304.
  - 2 The Vitellius text of the *Marvels of the East* (henceforth: *Marvels*) is edited in Rypins S. (ed.), *Three Old English Prose Texts in MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv*, Early English Text Society, o.s. 161 (London: 1924) 51–67, and *The “Beowulf” Manuscript: Complete Texts and “The Fight at Finsburgh”*, ed. and trans. R.D. Fulk (Cambridge – London: 2010) 15–31. An OE text and translation based on both the Vitellius and Tiberius manuscripts, together with an edition of the Latin original, is provided in Orchard A., *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the “Beowulf”-Manuscript* (Cambridge: 1995) 173–203. Since my focus is on the Vitellius version, all subsequent quotations from the *Marvels* are taken from Fulk (indicating the pages of his OE text and translation), while the paragraphs refer to Orchard’s edition. In general, I do not follow Fulk’s hyphenation of OE compounds, and the translations are adapted throughout, with occasional borrowings from Orchard.
  - 3 See, most recently: Mittman A.S. – Kim S.M., *Inconceivable Beasts: The “Wonders of the East” in the “Beowulf” Manuscript* (Tempe: 2013), which focusses on the Vitellius *Marvels*.

The following discussion of the *Marvels* examines the understudied version preserved in the defective “Beowulf” manuscript, whose Old English text is slightly shorter, and whose illustrations are markedly different from both the Tiberius and the Bodleian versions that appear to stem from the same exemplar. It has often been noted that, compared to the handsome Tiberius miniatures, the partly damaged and faded Vitellius drawings are ‘crude’ and even ‘debased’.<sup>4</sup> However, it is precisely this rawness and lack of sophistication that – I would argue – provide a more profound understanding of how, in the *Marvels*, the five senses not only appear as codes of alterity, hybridity, and both physical and moral aberration, but also serve as conduits of imagined contact and cultural encounter. The exotic creatures that populate its pages in words and images differ from the ordinary because the nature of their sensory perception is unlike our own experience. Yet they also challenge our perception of them, beckoning us to participate in their unfamiliar sensory interactions and to negotiate identity and difference through alternative ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. A close examination of how in the *Marvels* and in its accompanying drawings the five senses are simultaneously represented and engaged, therefore, not only opens new perspectives on this intriguing text but also adds to our understanding of sense perception in early England, reminding us that in the Middle Ages, much more so than today, reading an illustrated book was always a multisensory experience.

The stunning ninth-century Fuller Brooch, now at the British Museum [Fig. 6.1], attests to the early conceptualization of the five corporeal senses in England. The silver disc-brooch is believed to be the earliest known representation of the five senses in art, showing the wide-eyed personification of Sight in the centre, surrounded by the figures of Taste (who holds a hand in his mouth), Smell (with hands behind the back and nose in profile next to a plant), Touch (rubbing hands together) and Hearing (holding his right hand to his ear).<sup>5</sup>

In Anglo-Saxon England, the patristic exegesis regarding the traditional pentad of the physical senses was familiar from the works of, among others,

4 Rypins, *Three Old English Prose Texts* xlv; Sisam K., *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: 1953) 78; similarly Friedman J.B., *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (New York: 2000) 144. For a critique of this, see Mittman A.S., *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: 2006) 77.

5 A good discussion of the Fuller Brooch remains Bruce-Mitford R.L.S., “Late Saxon Disc-Brooches”, in Harden D.B. (ed.), *Dark-Age Britain: Studies Presented to E.T. Leeds* (London: 1956) 171–201, at 173–190.





FIGURE 6.1 *The late ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Fuller Brooch, showing the earliest known personification of the Five Senses. Hammered silver and niello, diameter: 11.4 cm. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM. IMAGE © TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM*

St Augustine and Gregory the Great,<sup>6</sup> and Anglo-Saxon theologians and writers developed their own vernacular terminology to discuss the nature and doctrinal implications of sensory perception.<sup>7</sup> The Old English words for ‘sense’ were

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- 6 E.g., Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.7, and *Expositio in Evangelium Lucae* 7.113; Augustine, *Confessiones*, book x, and *Sermo* 159.2; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* 11.6 and 21.2, and *Homiliae in Evangelia* 1.9, all of which were known in Anglo-Saxon England; see Gneuss H. – Lapidge M., *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: 2014). See also Palazzo E., “Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages”, *Viator* 41 (2010) 25–56, esp. 29–30.
- 7 See Fera R.M., “Metaphors for the Five Senses in Old English Prose”, *The Review of English Studies* 63 (2012) 709–731, and Katherine Storm Hindley’s contribution in the present volume.

*andgyt* ~ *andgit* or *gewit*; vision was OE *gesihð*; audition OE *hlyst*; gustation OE *swæc* or *byrging*; olfaction OE *stænc* or *swæc*; and tactition was OE *hrepung*, *grapung* or *æthrine*.<sup>8</sup> In his sermon on the Nativity of Christ, Ælfric of Eynsham (d. c. 1010) explains:

Seo sawul is þæs lichoman hlæfdige and heo gewissað þa fif andgitu ures lichaman swa swa of cynesætle. Þa andgitu sint gehatene þus: *Uisus*, þæt is gesihð; *auditus*, hlyst; *Gustus*, swæc on þam muðe, *Odoratus*, stænc on þæra nosa; *tactus*, hrepung oððe grapung on eallum limum ac þeah gewunelicost on þam handum.

(The soul is the mistress of the body, and governs the five senses of our body, as from a throne. These senses are thus named: *Visus*, that is, sight; *Auditus*, hearing; *Gustus*, taste with the mouth; *Odoratus*, smelling with the nose; *Tactus*, touching or feeling with all the limbs, but most usually with the hands.)<sup>9</sup>

In the surviving corpus of Old English, such systematized, encyclopaedic lists of the physical senses – which echo Isidore's *Etymologies*<sup>10</sup> – only occur in religious texts, and Ælfric in particular liked to include and moralize upon them in his homilies. But the ubiquity of the five senses in both the religious and secular literature of the period becomes clear once we realize how often, in poetry and prose, reference is made not only to the sense organs of the eye

8 *Dictionary of Old English*, ed. A. Cameron et al. (Toronto: 1986–) s.v. 'andgyt' etc.; *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, ed. A. diPaolo Healey et al. at [www.doe.utoronto.ca/pub/webcorpus.html](http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pub/webcorpus.html); and *A Thesaurus of Old English*, ed. J. Roberts et al., 2 vols., 2nd rev. ed. (Amsterdam – Atlanta: 2000).

9 Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. W.W. Skeat, Early English Text Society, o.s. 76 (London: 1881) vol. 1, 22–23; translation adapted. See also Ælfric's *Glossary*, in Zupitza J. (ed.), *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: 1966) 79: '*uisus* gesihð, *auditus* hlyst, *gustus* swæcc, *odoratus* stenc, *tactus* hrepung'; and the extracts from Ælfric's homilies quoted in Bruce-Mitford, "Late Saxon Disc-Brooches" 186–187.

10 Cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: 1911) xi.1.18–19: 'Sensus corporis quinque sunt: visus, auditus, odoratus, gustus et tactus. Ex quibus duo aperiuntur et clauduntur, duo semper patentes sunt. Sensus dicti, quia per eos anima subtilissime totum corpus agitat vigore sentiendi'. *The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S. Barney et al. (Cambridge: 2006) 232: 'The body has five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Among these, two become active or inactive, while another two are always receptive. They are called senses (*sensus*), because with their help the soul activates the entire body in a most subtle way with the power of sensation (*sentire*)'. Cf. Isidore, *Differentiae* 2.26.

(OE *eage*), ear (OE *ear*), nose (OE *neb* or *nosu*), mouth (OE *muð*), tongue (OE *tunge*), hand (OE *hand*) or skin (OE *hyd* or *fell*), but also to the sensory perceptions associated with them in verbs such as (*ge*)*seon*, (*ge*)*locian*, *behealdan* (‘to see, look, behold’), (*ge*)*hieran* (‘to hear’), (*ge*)*birgan*, *geswæccan* (‘to taste’), *epian*, *gestincan* (‘to smell’), and *æthrinan* or *gefelan* (‘to touch, feel’) – to name only the most common ones. In the Old English *Riddles* of the Exeter Book, for instance, a surrealistic array of eyes, noses, teeth, tongues, hands and feet typically provide the clues in riddles about personified and anthropomorphized objects and tools – a rake, a well-sweep, a wheel etc. – whose true identity we have to guess. Senses and bodies – either tortured and mutilated, or wonderfully spared and restored – similarly pervade Old English saints’ lives. In the eleventh-century *Passion of St Christopher*, preserved in the “Beowulf” manuscript, the sense of sight takes centre stage when the pagan emperor Dagnus, who has St Christopher tortured to death, is first miraculously blinded before he regains his sight with the help of the martyr’s blood and thus is – literally and spiritually – ‘led into the light’.<sup>11</sup> In *Beowulf*, the eponymous hero’s principal antagonists, Grendel and the dragon, are both endowed with an uncanny, preternatural sensory acuteness. Grendel, whose cannibalistic taste for human blood the poet describes with a mixture of horror and *jouissance*,<sup>12</sup> is introduced early in the poem as ‘the powerful demon’ tormented by the mere noise of the rejoicing Danes, who feast in their hall with harping and song (86–90a):

Ða se ellen-gæst earfoðlice  
 þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,  
 þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde  
 hludne in healle. Þær wæs hearpan sweg,  
 swutol sang scopes.

(Then the powerful demon endured the time with effort, he who waited in the shadows, that every day he heard noisy pleasures in the hall. There was the music of the harp, the clear song of the performer.)<sup>13</sup>

A keen sense of smell and hearing similarly distinguishes the hoard-keeping dragon in the second part of *Beowulf*. Sleeping in its lair, the ‘alert war-maker’ (‘*gearo guð-freca*’, 2414) scents the air to detect the intruding thief – ‘*stonc ða*

11 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 12.

12 Cf. *Beowulf* 742–743, about Grendel seizing a sleeping Dane: ‘bat ban-locan, blod edrum dranc, syn-snædum swealh’, ‘[he] bit into the body, drank the arterial blood, swallowed huge mouthfuls’, *The “Beowulf” Manuscript*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 135.

13 *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 90–93.

æfter stane [...] onfand feondes fot-last', 'it snuffled then across the stone [...] picked up the trace of an enemy' (2288–2289) – and later is aroused again when it hears Beowulf approaching (2554–2555a):

Hete wæs onhrered,    hord-weard oncnioſ  
mannes reorde [...]

(Hatred was stirred up; the hoard-keeper recognized the voice of a man [...]).<sup>14</sup>

Such a noticeable concern with the sensory perception of humans, monsters and beasts also informs the Old English *Marvels of the East*. Physical otherness and monstrosity in this text are typically related to notions of deformed and hybrid bodies, and often the sensory organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin are part of what constitutes the marvellous and alien. An early passage describing some hideous, twin-headed and eight-footed beasts said to be living near the Red Sea is typical of how, in the *Marvels*, often more than one corporeal sense or sensory organ is highlighted as characteristic of a creature's exotic or even monstrous nature (§ 4):

Eac þonne þær beoð wildeor acenned; þa deor þonne hy mannes stefne gehyrað, þonne fleoð hy feor. Þa deor habbað eahta fet ond wælcyrrian eagan ond twa heafdu; gif him hwylc mon onfon wille, þonne hiera lichoman þæt hy onælað. Þæt syndon þa ungefrægelicu deor.

(In addition, wild animals are native there; when these beasts hear a human voice, they flee far away. The beasts have eight feet and Valkyries' eyes and two heads; if anyone wants to take hold of them, they set their bodies aflame. Those are unheard-of creatures.)<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious that these creatures are 'unheard-of' and 'extraordinary' ('ungefrægelicu')<sup>16</sup> not only because of their monstrous anatomy (the con-

14 *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 236–237, 254–255.

15 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 16–19.

16 The adjective occurs again in *Marvels* §6, where the phrase is echoed ('Þæt syndon ungefrægelicu liblac', 'That is unheard-of magic'). In both instances, there is no equivalent in the original Latin version, so that '[i]n comparison to the Latin text, the Old English [...] seems to be expressing its own wonder at these beasts' (Kim S.M. – Mittman A.S., "Ungefrægelicu deor: Truth and the Wonders of the East", *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 2 [2010] 1–22, at 5).



FIGURE 6.2 *Twin-headed and eight-footed beasts. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 99r.*

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

joined bodies and doubled heads and feet), but also because of the distinct sensory qualities associated with them. These wondrous qualities concern the senses of hearing, sight and touch, as expressed in the terms 'gehyrað' ('hear') and 'onælað' ('take hold') and – most notably – in the creature's startling 'Valkyries' eyes' ('wælcyrrian eagan'). The latter freely translates 'oculos [...] gorgoneos' ('Gorgon's eyes') from the Latin original, substituting the classical female monster with the warlike maiden from Norse mythology.<sup>17</sup> The detail stresses the non-human nature of the noxious beasts' look, suggesting that they are able to turn their enemies to stone by their gaze, or otherwise cast an evil eye on them.<sup>18</sup> In the accompanying illustration (fol. 99r) [Fig. 6.2], the beast's eyes are highlighted, and our gaze moves from the tangle of legs to the long curved tongues that stick out from the two open mouths.

<sup>17</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 176 (§ 4).

<sup>18</sup> That the Gorgons 'used to turn men to stone by their sight' is recorded in the perhaps Anglo-Latin *Liber monstrorum* (i.38), ed. and trans. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 254–320, at 278–279.



### Sight – gesihð

In the *Marvels*, eyes and sight encode physical otherness and unattainability. Eyes (OE *eagan*) may shine brightly even in darkness, adding to the anomalous nature of both animals and men, as in the case of the two-headed snakes found in the region of Hascellentia (§ 5): ‘þa nædran habbað twa heafdu, þara eagan scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blæcern’ (‘the snakes have two heads, whose eyes shine at night as brightly as a lamp’).<sup>19</sup> The same is reported later in the text of some unnamed eastern island-people, who are marked out by their luminescent eyes (§ 22):

Donne is sum ealond on þæm beoð men acende þara eagan scinaþ swa leohte swa man micel blacern onele on þeostre nihte.

(Then there is a certain island on which people are born whose eyes shine as brightly as if one had lit a great lamp on a dark night.)<sup>20</sup>

In these instances, the marvellous yet uncanny aspect of what is being described is the paradox of a light glowing at night, of eyes that see and *are seen*, both in darkness and in spite of it – an essentially unnatural and deviant feature that also characterizes the monstrous Grendel in *Beowulf*, whose eyes shine like fire at the nightly sight of the Danes sleeping in the hall (‘him of eagem stod / ligge gelicost leoht unfæger’, ‘from his eyes emanated an unlovely light very like a flame’, 726b–727).<sup>21</sup> Eyes, on the other hand, may also be absurdly displaced and freakish as those of the headless Blemmyae, who carry their faces on their huge chests (§ 15):

Ponne syndon opere ealond suð from Brixonte, on þon beoð men acende buton heafdum, þa habbað on hyra breostum heora eagan ond muð. Hy seondon eahta fota lange ond eahta fota brade.

(Then there are other islands south of the Brixontes, on which there are born people without heads, who have their eyes and mouth on their chests. They are eight feet tall and eight feet wide.)<sup>22</sup>

19 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 18–19.

20 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 24–27.

21 *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 134–135. For the shining eyes as a sign of Grendel’s descent from Cain, see Williams D., *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: 1996) 149–150.

22 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 22–23.



FIGURE 6.3 *Blemmyae*. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 102v.

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In the accompanying illustration in all three manuscripts,<sup>23</sup> the creature's eyes, ears, nose and mouth look just like those of a normal human being, but it is precisely this simultaneous familiarity and displacement that renders the Blemmyae both utterly disquieting and strangely compelling [Fig. 6.3]. Moreover, it has been noted, this is the only of the wondrous races depicted in the *Marvels* 'to gaze directly out of the page at his viewer', while most others seem to 'avoid any eye contact'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in no fewer than three instances in the text, the strange inhabitants of the East shy away from travellers to their unfamiliar regions as soon as they see them. In all three occurrences, the verbs of perception are OE *geseon* ('to see') and *ongytan* ('to perceive, notice'), each time used in collocation. The tricoloured and lion-maned giants of Ciconia (§ 12), for instance, are said to have a 'mouth as big as a fan', but

23 Vitellius, fol. 102v; Tiberius, fol. 82r; Bodleian, fol. 41r.

24 Mittman, *Maps and Monsters* 97.

Gyf hi hwylcne monnan on þæm landum ongitað oððe geseoþ, oððe him hwilc folgiende bið, þonne feor þæt hi fleoð, ond blode hy swætað.

(If they perceive or see anyone in those lands, or if anyone is following them, they flee far away, and they sweat blood.)<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the half-human and half-donkey Homodubii (§ 17) are known for their ‘long legs’ and ‘pleasant voice’, yet ‘they flee far away’ as soon as ‘they notice or see anyone in those lands’ (‘Gif hy hwilcne man on þæm landum ongytað oððe geseoð, þonne fleoð hy feor’).<sup>26</sup> Here again, seeing implies the danger of being seen, and both the giants of Ciconia and the cross-bred Homodubii instinctively flee from the sight of intruding humans they seem to be afraid of. As Katherine Storm Hindley demonstrates, such a conception of sight conforms to the ideas expressed in the writings of Augustine, for whom seeing is an active process of establishing physical contact between the seer and the object seen, so that seeing is understood as a form of touching.<sup>27</sup> The fleeing creatures in the *Marvels* thus usher us into their strange habitat only to vanish from our sight, avoiding physical contact. In the Vitellius manuscript, this moment of mutual recognition and horror is enhanced in the drawing of the Ciconian giant (fol. 102r) [Fig. 6.4]: holding what appears to be some kind of plant in its massive right hand, the naked figure stands as if transfixed in a movement of retreat or flight, with both eyes staring at us, just as frightened to be seen as we are to see it.

### Hearing – hlyst

In the *Marvels*, the same timidity towards strangers is also ascribed to the race of the big-eared Panotii living east of the Red Sea (§ 21). Again, it is the sensory acuteness which both establishes and prevents physical contact – rendering the other ultimately unattainable and ever escaping to unknowable territories – only that in the case of the bizarre Panotii this seems to be due as much to their faculty of seeing as to their enormous ears:

<sup>25</sup> *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 22–23.

<sup>26</sup> *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 22–23.

<sup>27</sup> See Hindley’s discussion of visual imagery in the OE *Boethius* and *Soliloquies* in the present volume.





FIGURE 6.4 *Giants of Ciconia. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 102r.*

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

Hy habbað micel heafod ond earan swæ fon. Oþer eare hy him on niht underbreað, ond mid oþran hy wreoð him. Beoð þa earan swiðe leohte ond hy beoð swa on lichoman swa hwhite swa meolc. Gyf hy hwilcne mannan on þæm lande geseoð oðþe ongytað, þonne nymað hy hyra earan him on hand on fleoð swiðe, swa hrædlece swa is wen þæt hy fleogen.

(They have a large head and ears like a fan. One ear they spread under them at night, and with the other they wrap themselves. The ears are very light, and their bodies are as white as milk. And if they see or perceive anyone in that land, they take their ears in their hands and flee far away, so swiftly one might think that they fly.)<sup>28</sup>

28 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 24–25.



FIGURE 6.5 *Panotii*. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 104r.

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

Although the text does not explicitly refer to the sense of hearing, in the accompanying Vitellius illustration (fol. 104r) [Fig. 6.5], the herbivorous member of the Panotii is shown to be fully alert and indeed ‘all ears’, staring at the reader/viewer as if caught by surprise and ready to run.<sup>29</sup> Merely hearing a ‘human voice’ (*‘mannes stefne’*) similarly puts to flight the Valkyrie-eyed animals described in § 4 of the *Marvels*. In the case of the cannibalistic Donestre (§ 20), however, the faculty of hearing takes another, more sinister turn:

29 Compare the Panotii in Tiberius (fol. 83v) and Bodleian (fol. 43b), who carry their long snake-like ears ‘looped over their arms like sausages’ (Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 18) and whose comfortable demeanour does not indicate any sense of fear or shyness.

Donne is sum ealond in þære Readan Sæ, þær is mancyn þæt is mid us Donestre nemned [...] ond hy cunnon eall mennisce gereord. Þonne hy fremdes cynnes mannan geseoð, þonne nemnað hy hine ond his magas cupra manna naman, ond mid leaslicum wordum hy hine beswicað ond hine gefoð, ond æfter þan hy hine fretað ealne buton þon heafde ond þonne sittað ond wepað ofer þam heafde.

(Then there is a certain island in the Red Sea where there is a race of people we call Donestre [...] and they know all human speech. When they see someone from a foreign race, they name him and his kinsmen with the names of acquaintances, and with lying words they beguile him and capture him, and after that devour him all up except for the head, and then sit and weep over the head.)<sup>30</sup>

What makes the polyglot Donestre particularly fearsome is not just their unwholesome appetite and theatrical remorse, but their deceitful use of the physical senses. Sight, hearing, touch and taste are all cunningly deployed by this race of people (‘mancyn’). Not only do they ‘see’ (OE *geseon*) and choose their unwary victims, but they also hear and recognize (OE *cunnon*) the language of humans, luring them into the gruesome fate of being captured (OE *gefon*) and devoured (OE *fretan*), as shown in the accompanying drawing (fol. 103v) [Fig. 6.6].

### Taste – swæc

The Donestre are not the only man-eaters in the *Marvels*. Of the race of some dark-coloured giants called Hostes, that is ‘Enemies’ (§ 13), the text laconically states that ‘whatever person they catch, they devour him’ (‘swa hwylcne man swa hy gelæccað, þonne fretað hi hyne’).<sup>31</sup> The term here is again OE *fretan*, ‘to devour, eat voraciously, consume’ like a beast,<sup>32</sup> and it is worth noting that in the Vitellius manuscript the same verb is also used for Grendel’s gory cannibalism (*Beowulf* 1580–1582):

<sup>30</sup> *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 24–25.

<sup>31</sup> *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 22–23.

<sup>32</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. ‘fretan’.



FIGURE 6.6 *Donestre*. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 103v.

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

þonne he Hroðgares heorð-geneatas  
sloh on sweofote, slæpende fræt  
folces Denigea fyftyne men

(when he struck at Hrothgar's inner circle in their sleep, devoured fifteen men of the Danish nation at rest).<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, OE *fretan* denotes a bestial and monstrous form of consumption, and therefore contrasts with the more human *etan* ('to eat') – as in Modern German 'fressen' vs 'essen' – a distinction that is consistently upheld in the *Marvels*, when it says of the shaggy Ichthyophagi known from classical antiquity and the Alexander legend (§ 8):

33 *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 190–191 (translation adapted).

On sumon lande beoð men acende þa beoð on lenge syx fotmæla. Hi habbað beardas oþ cneow side ond feax oð helan. Homodubii hy syndon hatene, þæt beoð twimen, ond be hreawum fixum hy lifiað ond þa *etap*.

(In one land people are born who are six feet tall. They have beards down to the knee and hair to the heel. They are called Homodubii, that is 'doubtful people', and they live on raw fish and *eat* them.)<sup>34</sup>

The bearded fish-eaters in the *Marvels* are in fact the hairy but naked and shy 'Ictifafonas' of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. The *Letter*, which immediately follows the text of the *Marvels* in the Vitellius manuscript, locates them in India, where they are said to hunt and eat whales ('hronfiscas'), and again the verb used is *etan* rather than *fretan*: 'þa æton ond be þæm lifdon ond þæt wæter æfter druncon', 'then they eat them [i.e., the whales] and live on them, and drink the water afterwards'.<sup>35</sup> While the *Letter* does not specify whether the Ichthyophagi eat their whale meat raw or cooked, the *Marvels* text, on the other hand, suggests that to eat one's food uncooked is a sign of cultural deviance and even barbarism, casting a shadow of doubt on the very human nature of these fish-eating people: both their looks and their eating habits render them 'doubtful men' ('Homodubii'). Not surprisingly, an uncommon diet may even become an exotic people's sole characteristic, as in § 28 of the *Marvels*: 'Be þæm garsecge [...] syndon men þe be hreawum flæsce ond be hunie hy lifiað' ('By the ocean [...] there are people who live on raw meat and honey').<sup>36</sup>

Such an interest in outlandish tastes is further evident in the entry about the eastern Temple of the Sun (§ 23). Here, the quiet priest serving the temple is said to eat 'no other food than sea-oysters, and he lived on them' ('se nænine oþerne mete ne þige buton sæ-ostrum, ond be þam he lifede'), a phrase that is missing from the Latin original and only occurs in the Old English Vitellius text.<sup>37</sup>

34 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 20–21 (my emphasis).

35 *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* § 29, ed. and trans. in Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 224–253, at 242–243. The Ichthyophagi are also included in the *Liber monstrorum* (i.15), ed. and trans. in Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 268–269.

36 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 28–29.

37 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 26–27.





FIGURE 6.7 *Meat- and Honey-Eaters (?)*. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 106r.

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

### Smell – stænc

While the lavish Tiberius manuscript of the *Marvels* includes a portrait of both the hairy Ichthyophagus (fol. 80r) and the meat- and honey-eater (fol. 85v), the Vitellius manuscript lacks a drawing of the former, and it is unclear whether the figure in the upper half of fol. 106r actually represents the meat- and honey-eating people mentioned in § 28. What we see instead seems to belie the text written next to it [Fig. 6.7]: there is a man dressed in a tunic and sitting on a



FIGURE 6.8 *Two-faced giants. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 101v.*

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

cushion under an arcade that elegantly frames the drawing. The index finger of his right hand is pointing at something outside the limits of the page, but it is the odd proportion of the man's wide open eye and his crooked beak-like nose that most hold our attention.

Indeed, the nose is the one facial feature that repeatedly and most noticeably disfigures the creatures illustrated in the *Vitellius Marvels*. In the drawings of the centaur-like Homodubii (§ 17, fol. 102v), the kindly rulers of the Red Sea (§ 25, fol. 105r), the fierce bearded huntresses (§ 26, fol. 105v) and the giant, long-haired women with ox-tails, camel's feet and boar's tusks (§ 27, fol. 105v), the nose is bizarrely oversized and misshapen like that of the two-faced giants living near the river Nile (fol. 101v) [Fig. 6.8], whose 'long noses' are highlighted in the text (§ 11):

Ðær beoð cende men, hy beoð fiftyne fota lange, ond hy habbað hwit lic  
ond twa neb on anum heafde, fet ond cneowu swyðe reade ond lange  
nosa ond sweart feax.

(There are people born there, who are fifteen feet tall and have a white  
body and two faces on a single head, very red feet and knees, and long  
noses and black hair.)<sup>38</sup>

In the drawings of the Vitellius *Marvels*, the shape of the nose can also indicate a more animalistic, non-human feature, as in the case of the composite race of the Cynocephali or Dogheads (§ 7), whom the text locates in southern Egypt and who are also prominently featured in the *Passion* of the dog-headed St Christopher immediately preceding the *Marvels* in the Vitellius manuscript (fols. 94r–98r). In the illustration (fol. 100r) [Fig. 6.9], the creature's nose is drawn like a dog's muzzle in semi-profile, thus accentuating the canine features of the head which grotesquely tops the otherwise fully humanized figure wrapped in a costly dress and even wearing shoes. Similarly, in the illustration of the cannibalistic Donestre (fol. 103v) [Fig. 6.6], the unmistakably monstrous man-eater is shown not only with a long muzzle like a dog or wolf, but even holding a dismembered human leg that he is about to devour 'while appearing to sniff at it with his canine snout'.<sup>39</sup> Like its better-known parallel in the Tiberius codex, the Vitellius illustration, therefore, represents the Donestre's cannibalistic act as a transgressive sensory experience that involves not only sight, hearing and taste – as has been noted earlier – but also smell and touch.

### Touch – hrepung

The sense of touch, in terms of both actively touching and passively being touched, figures prominently and repeatedly in the *Marvels*. For one thing, touching an unfamiliar creature can be hazardous. Of the exotic beasts listed early in the text, three are said to be so poisonous that one could die or even burn up in flames by just brushing against them. This is true for the

<sup>38</sup> *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulke, 20–21.

<sup>39</sup> Monk C., "A Context for the Sexualization of Monsters in *The Wonders of the East*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012) 79–99, at 80. A similar act of sniffing or perhaps touching seems to be involved in the Vitellius illustration of the cannibalistic Hostes, who is seen stretching out his hand to his unwary victim (§ 13, fol. 102r, lower half).





FIGURE 6.9 *Dogheads (Cynocephali)*, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 100r.

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

Valkyrie-eyed twin creatures of § 4, as well as for the fiery red hens of Lentibelsinea near the Red Sea (§ 3), and the species of snakes found south of Babylon (§ 6):

[...] þæm beoð henna acenned onlice ðam þe mid us beoð reades heowes. Gif hi hwylc man niman wile oþþe him o æthrined, þonne forbærnað hy sona eal his lic. Ðæt syndon ungefrægelicu liblac.

([...] hens are born there like ours, red in colour. If anyone tries to take or touch them at all, they immediately burn up all his body. That is unheard-of magic.)

and:

[...] nædrena mænego [...] þa hatton Corsias. Ða habbað swa micle hornas swa weðeras. Gif hy hwilcne man sleað oþþe a æthrined, þonne swylteð he sona.

([There is] a multitude of snakes [...] that are called Corsias. They have horns as big as rams have. If anyone strikes or touches them at all, he immediately dies.)<sup>40</sup>

Like the shy giants of Ciconia (§ 12), the hybrid Homodubii (§ 17) and the giant-eared Panotii (§ 21), who all run away to escape human sight, these beasts cannot be touched or captured. Physical – i.e., sensory – contact in the *Marvels*, however, is not solely monstrous (as, most dramatically, in the case of the cannibalistic Donestre), or toxic, or ephemeral and ultimately impossible (as in the accounts of the shy and fleeing creatures). As the text approaches its end, reaching, as it were, the yet uncharted fringes of the world, the reader – like Mandeville’s traveller – comes upon a number of strange races whose chief characteristic is, paradoxically, the very absence of monstrosity, freakishness and violence. The first of these are the ‘people who live on raw meat and honey’ (§ 28) already discussed above. They are followed by the ‘hospitable people’ (‘gæstlīpende men’) in a passage that echoes, as John Block Friedman has observed, what the Alexander tradition reports about the Conqueror’s encounter with the sage and peaceful Brahmins or Gymnosophists

40 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 16–17 and 18–19.

of India.<sup>41</sup> The typically vague description in the Old English *Marvels* situates their kingdom 'near the Ocean' (§ 29–30):

[...] þær beoð gæstliþende men, cyningas þa habbaþ under him monigfealde leodhatan [...] Ðis mancyn lyfið fela geara, ond hy syndon fremfulle men. Gif hwilc mon him to cymð, þonne gifað hy him wif ær hy hine onweg læten. Se Macedonisca Alexander, þa he him to com, þa wæs he wundriende hyra menniscnesse, ne wolde he hi cwellan ne him nan lað don.

([...] there are hospitable people there, kings who have under them many tyrants [...] This race of people live for many years, and they are kind people. If anyone comes to them, they give him a woman before they let him go away. The Macedonian Alexander, when he visited them, was amazed at their humanity, and he would not kill them or do them any harm.)<sup>42</sup>

In the Vitellius manuscript, this is strikingly visualized in two separate drawings, an unusual pattern in the *Marvels*. In the lower third of fol. 106r [Fig. 6.10], we see how a robed man holding a curved staff – perhaps a visiting stranger or a member of the 'kind people' – encounters another man who appears to be similarly dressed but whose features are barely visible on the fingered and brittle margin of the damaged page. There is a thin vertical line that separates the framed picture into two halves, drawing our attention to the two neatly drawn open hands that the figures extend in an obvious gesture of greeting and welcome. Their hands do not touch, but are about to touch, and their open eyes, which are so noticeably different from the ominous and panicked stare of most other creatures depicted throughout the text, further indicate a friendly encounter. The second drawing (fol. 106v) [Fig. 6.11] shows a member of the Hospitable People presenting – or perhaps the stranger receiving – a woman as a gift. The woman, whose face is just visible at the damaged upper margin of the page, is tightly held in the arms of the standing figure (whose face is no longer recognizable), suggesting a calm intimacy.<sup>43</sup> At the bottom of the same manuscript page, a drawing of two men representing the race of Ethiopians

41 Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 145.

42 *Marvels*, ed. and trans. Fulk, 28–29.

43 This is again unlike the Tiberius miniature (fol. 86r), in which 'the Wife-givers are depicted as a group of four human males in medieval dress manhandling a woman wearing a contemporary gown' (Strickland D.H., "Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages",



FIGURE 6.10 *Hospitable People. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 106r.*  
IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

(§ 32) concludes the *Vitellius Marvels*, and again the two figures step out of the frame and stretch out their arms not to threaten or deceive, but rather to welcome us, engaging our senses in a way that is neither monstrous nor necessarily strange.

The placid and benign people described and illustrated in these closing pages of the *Marvels* contrast starkly with the menacing beasts and hostile races mentioned earlier in the text. Unlike these, the Meat- and Honey-eaters, the hospitable Wife-givers and the peaceable Ethiopians are not characterized by an odd or unwholesome nature of their sensations. Rather, what distinguishes them is their humanity, which – as Greta Austin notes – is indicated ‘through the speaking gestures of the illustrations’ that encourage the reader to view these Eastern peoples ‘not with distaste but, rather, with curiosity’, and

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in Mittman A.S. – Dendle P.J. [eds.], *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* [Farnham: 2012] 365–386, at 373).





FIGURE 6.11 *A woman presented by the Hospitable People. British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 106v.*

IMAGE © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

as fellow human beings.<sup>44</sup> In the concluding Vitellius drawings, these speaking gestures involve the sense of touch, suggesting that touching inevitably means being touched, and hence to make contact, as Isidore of Seville explains in his

44 Austin G., "Marvellous Peoples or Marvellous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*", in Jones T.S. – Sprunger D.A. (eds.), *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo: 2002) 25–51, at 28 and 42, referring to the Tiberius *Marvels*.

*Etymologies*: 'Touch is so called, because it strokes and makes contact and distributes the power of this sense through all the limbs'.<sup>45</sup>

In the *Marvels of the East*, the textual and visual representations of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch are central to the text's probing of what constitutes the bestial, the monstrous or the human. Yet while the wondrous creatures enact the exoticism of their sensations, the readers/viewers engage in their own sensory interaction with the text and images on the page. In the recent scholarship on the *Marvels*, this unique sensorial quality has not gone unnoticed. Despite the bestial ferocity and threat present in many of its creatures, the medieval reader would 'hold the manuscript fearlessly', Asa Mittman writes, so that the 'physicality of this interaction challenges the viewer's notions of distance, bringing in close that which rightly belongs at a great distance'.<sup>46</sup> In a similar vein, Lara Farina pointedly remarks that for the reader of the *Marvels*, the sense of touch is reciprocal, since codices were made of parchment, i.e., animal hide. Skin, therefore, is 'both a medium for and a source for tactile sensation. Our own skin lets us be touched; the skin of others touches us'. This, Farina argues, is particularly striking in the case of the *Marvels*' description of the naked Blemmyae: 'Holding the manuscript, we touch and are touched by skin that is contiguous with the Blemmye's [*sic*]. To "read" the Blemmye is to touch it'.<sup>47</sup> What applies to the headless monster also holds true for the other wondrous creatures that we encounter throughout the text. They are both distant and close, both strange and familiar, and thus make us aware that 'while the geographical distance might be great, the *conceptual* distance between Us and Them [...] is not so'.<sup>48</sup> In the *Marvels*, distance is both created and overcome through the text's conceptualization of the five senses as indicators of difference and sameness. The Anglo-Saxons who copied, illuminated and read the *Marvels* must have thought of the five corporeal senses as conduits

45 Isidore, *Etymologiae*, xi.1.23, ed. Lindsay: 'Tactus, eo quod pertractet et tangat et per omnia membra vigorem sensus aspergat.' Translation adapted from Barney et al., 232.

46 Mittman, *Maps and Monsters* 97.

47 Farina L., "Wondrous Skins and Tactile Affection: The Blemmye's Touch", in Walter K.L. (ed.), *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: 2013) 11–28, at 11 and 24.

48 Strickland, "Monstrosity and Race" 373 (emphasis in text). See also Mittman A.S. – Kim S.M., "Monsters and the Exotic in Medieval England", in Treharne E. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English* (Oxford: 2010) 677–706, esp. 687, noting the 'familiarity in strangeness' of both the hybrid monsters and the culturally alien humans in the *Marvels*.

or 'windows' through which we reach out to the objects of the material world outside – a metaphor used by Gregory the Great in his *Moralia in Iob*:

Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching are a kind of ways of the mind, by which it should come forth without [...] For these senses of the body are like windows through which the soul takes a view of the exterior objects, and on viewing covets them.<sup>49</sup>

In the Old English *Marvels of the East*, this becomes a two-way experience of both perceiving and being perceived. The five senses in this absorbing text are windows through which we observe, wonder and covet, seeing ourselves looking back at us.

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49 *Moralia in Iob*, 21.2, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 76.189: 'Visus quippe, auditus, gustus, odoratus, et tactus, quasi quaedam viae mentis sunt, quibus foras veniat [...] Per hos etenim corporis sensus quasi per fenestras quasdam exteriora quaeque anima respicit, respiciens concupiscit.' Translation adapted from Gregory the Great, *Morals of the Book of Job*, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Church, vol. 21 (Oxford: 1845) vol. 2, 515–516.

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## The Perils of the Flesh: John Wyclif's Preaching on the Five Bodily Senses

Sean A. Otto

John Wyclif died December 31st, 1384, having suffered a second stroke while attending mass at his parish of St Mary's, Lutterworth. The most eminent philosopher of his day at Oxford, Wyclif was also a tireless reformer and preacher, as well as a controversial figure, both in his own day and in subsequent historiography, often depicted as a proto-Reformer<sup>1</sup> and seen as a harbinger of modernity and the rise of individualism.<sup>2</sup> It has been the project of much recent Wyclif scholarship to recover Wyclif the medieval theologian,<sup>3</sup> and looking at his sermons is extremely helpful in this regard. His preaching demonstrates that he was much less of an innovator than either his contemporaries or later interpreters would have us believe.<sup>4</sup>

We have extant some 245 sermons from Wyclif's pen, two of which discuss the five bodily senses in depth, and a handful of which discuss the closely related sins of the tongue.<sup>5</sup> Wyclif deals with the senses in his sermons in a

- 1 He was famously called the 'Morning Star of the Reformation', a cognomen first given by Bishop Bale, see Aston M., "John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation", *Past and Present* 30 (1965) 23–51 and Keen M., "The Influence of Wyclif", in Kenny A. (ed.), *Wyclif in His Times* (Oxford: 1986) 127–145.
- 2 This view was especially espoused by Herbert Workman in his seminal biography of Wyclif, see Workman H.B., *John Wyclif: A Study of the Medieval English Church* (Oxford: 1926) vol. 2, 19–20 and the corrective view of Catto J.I., "Wyclif and Wycliffism in Oxford 1356–1430", in Catto J.I. – Evans T.A. (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: 1992) vol. 2, 175–261.
- 3 See Levy I.C. (ed.), *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden – Boston: 2006).
- 4 See Scheuchzer K., "'Eate not, taste not, touch not'. The Five Senses in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*" elsewhere in this volume for a similar discussion of John Foxe's use of sense perception.
- 5 For the five bodily senses, see Wyclif's *Sermones*, ed. J. Loserth (London: 1887–1890; reprint, New York: 1966) vol. 1, 30 and 31 (see also Wyclif *Trialogus*, ed. G. Lechler [Oxford: 1869] 93–100); on the sins of the tongue, see *Sermones* vol. 3, 21; vol. 3, 53; vol. 4, 26 and 52. All references to Wyclif's *Sermones* are in the following format: volume, sermon number.page/line numbers.

moralizing way: working from their physical characteristics, for which he is dependent on unnamed philosophers, as well as the physical placement of the sense organs, the particular abuses to which each of the senses is subject are then outlined, and more particularly how the senses can lead into mortal sin. In this sort of moralization, Wyclif was far from alone; medieval understandings of the body linked the moral and the physical closely together, and the senses were implicated in this construction intimately.<sup>6</sup> It is the construction of a hierarchy of senses, as well as the ultimate failure of this structure, and the moral implications which Wyclif draws from his understanding of the sensorium that will be my focus here. As we shall see, it is the moral dangers of the senses that ultimately undermine any neat hierarchy or structuring of the sensorium. Further, we shall see that Wyclif's preaching on the bodily senses and the sins of the tongue relies heavily on traditional scientific and moral teaching on the senses, and demonstrates his continuity with, and participation in, an important aspect of the medieval preaching tradition.

Wyclif's sensorium draws its structure from commonplace scholastic understandings of how the senses and sense organs work.<sup>7</sup> Most of the details of the natural philosophical understanding of senses and sensation are passed over by Wyclif, however, as he is more interested in moralization and the pastoral application of scientific learning than in scientific exposition itself.<sup>8</sup> It is not that Wyclif was ignorant of the details of the scientific treatments of

6 The moral implications of the senses in medieval thought and culture are explored in Woolgar C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: 2006) 7–10, Tillette J.-Y., "Le Symbolisme des cinq sens dans la littérature morale et spirituelle des xi<sup>e</sup> et xii<sup>e</sup> siècles", *Micrologus* 10 (2002) 15–32, and Casagrande C., "Sistema dei sensi e classificazione dei peccati (secoli xii–xiii)", *Micrologus* 10 (2002) 33–53, which has handy schemas of senses and associated sins at 48–53.

7 There was some disagreement about the ordering of the hierarchy of senses, with hearing often receiving pride of place. See Nichols S. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore: 2008) vii–ix, which gives the examples of Grosseteste, who apparently favoured hearing, for example in the opening chapters of his *Hexaëmeron*, ed. R.C. Dales – S. Gieben (London: 1982), and his student Roger Bacon, who favoured sight, for example in his *Perspectiva*, ed. and trans. D.C. Lindburg (Oxford: 1996). For a broader discussion of the topic, see Synnott A., "Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx", in Howes D. (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: 1991) 61–76 and Jütte R., *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. J. Lynn (Oxford: 2005): for differing interpretations of the physical aspects of sensation, see 31–52, and for the hierarchical ordering of the senses, see 61–71.

8 An example of a work where the author integrates more fully the scientific and the moral is Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*, trans. R. Newhauser (Toronto: 2012), where the intricacies of perspectivist optics are applied to homiletic needs.

the senses and sensation of his day; he was keenly interested in perspectivist optics, for instance, and even turned to this science in his arguments, both in his sermons and elsewhere, about the nature of the Eucharist.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere in the *Sermones*, Wyclif demonstrates his scientific knowledge, expounding upon the nature of lightning,<sup>10</sup> the properties of salt,<sup>11</sup> and the properties of light.<sup>12</sup> He also left a treatise, *De actibus anime*, which deals with many of the philosophical questions surrounding perception and sensation.<sup>13</sup> Why he chose to forego the details which so clearly interested him elsewhere, and which other, popular, authors turned to such good homiletic effect, is related to the nature of the *Sermones* as model collections.<sup>14</sup> As model collections, they were meant for the use of other preachers, who were free to change the material as they saw fit, adjusting the sermons to the needs and capacities of their audience;<sup>15</sup> accordingly they do not necessarily reflect either what Wyclif or some other preacher using Wyclif's *Sermones* actually said in the pulpit. There is an inherent instability in model sermons, then, as they were meant to be instructive rather than prescriptive, and since their contents should be matched to their audience, there would not necessarily be a need to expand upon the underlying science, especially if this had been done elsewhere. These sermons dealing with the bodily senses are an instance of Wyclif writing in a popular vein, leaving aside the more erudite and esoteric aspects of his learning in order to deliver a simpler, more accessible message, one which was designed with the needs of preachers in mind rather than the needs of natural philosophers.

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- 9 See *Sermones* vol. 4, 42.352/17–33, *De Eucharistia*, 299–301 and *passim*, and Philips H., “John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist”, in Hudson A. – Wilks M. (eds.), *From Ockham to Wyclif* (1987) 245–258.
  - 10 *Sermones* vol. 2, 34.248/20–27.
  - 11 *Sermones* vol. 2, 52.380/17–34, 382/3–25; vol. 2, 54.394/23–35.
  - 12 *Sermones* vol. 2, 53.384/20–386/7, 388/9–22; vol. 2, 55.400/15–20.
  - 13 *De actibus anime* in *Miscellanea Philosophica*, ed. M.H. Dziewicki, 2 vols. (London: 1902–1905; reprint, New York: 1966) vol. 1, 1–127.
  - 14 On model sermon collections, see Wenzel S., *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England: Orthodox Preaching in the Age of Wyclif* (Cambridge – New York: 2005) 1–20 and Beriou N., “Les sermons latins après 1200”, in Mayne Kienzle B. (ed.), *The Sermon* (Turnhout: 2000) 363–447.
  - 15 Wyclif explicitly remarks on several occasions that the *Sermones* can be expanded depending on the nature of the audience listening. See Hudson A., “Aspects of the ‘Publication’ of Wyclif’s Latin Sermons”, in Minnis A.J. (ed.), *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A.I. Doyle* (Woodbridge: 1994) 121–131 and Hudson A., “Wyclif’s Latin Sermons: Questions of Form, Date and Audience”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 68 (2001) 223–248.

At the top of Wyclif's hierarchy of the senses sits sight, which for him was the subtlest of the five exterior senses. He gives three reasons for sight's exalted status among the bodily senses: first, because the eyes can perceive objects at a distance, even the stars; second, because they are located in the highest position of any of the sense organs and their anatomy is more ingenious than that of the other sensitive organs;<sup>16</sup> and third because the sense of sight is closest to the interior senses, as evidenced by the imagination's use of visual impressions when dreaming.<sup>17</sup> But just as sight is the most powerful and noble of the senses, so it is the most open to abuse, for its wandering is more dangerous than that of the others, more distracting from knowledge, and much worse if the sense is used in a forbidden way (*multo magis si sensus sit vetitus*), as it is written in Matthew 5:28: 'whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart'.<sup>18</sup>

Commenting on Matthew 6:22 ('If your eye is single, then your whole body will be full of light'), Wyclif says that we should understand that if the eye is single, it serves the intellect as it ought, so the light is virtue for the whole body. Since all the virtues and vices are connected, and since virtue and vice cannot be cultivated at the same time, it follows that this simplicity in any organ is the soul's virtue.<sup>19</sup> But the eye can lead into mortal sin: a base look can lead to pride and envy, a wanton look to wrath, accidia, gluttony and lust. All of the senses are capable of being led astray, but the real guilt, of course, lies in the sinning soul, not in the sense or its object, and the root of sin is the Devil.<sup>20</sup>

16 The construction of a hierarchy of senses based on physical placement is found also in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Discretio vitae a quinque sensibus animae*, found in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. Leclercq – H. Rochais, 8 vols. (Rome: 1957–1997; reprint, Turnhout: 1993–2000) vol. 6, 1.121–124.

17 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.204/17–35. Cf. *Dialogus* 93–100, where Wyclif discusses the five exterior senses, those listed here, and the five interior senses: the *sensus communis*, the imaginative power, the aestimative power, the phantastic power and the power of memory, and Wyclif, *De actibus anime*. On interior senses, see Pasnau R., "Human Nature", in McGrade A.S. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: 2003) 208–230, at 215–217, cf. Mahoney E.P., "Sense, Intellect, and Imagination in Albert, Thomas, and Siger", in Kretzmann N. – Kenny A. – Pinborg J. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: 1982) 602–622, at 603–604 and 606–607, and Heller-Roazen D., "Common Sense: Greek, Arabic, Latin", in Nichols S. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore: 2008) 30–50.

18 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.205/4–9.

19 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.205/13–21.

20 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.213/6–15.

The second external sense in Wyclif's hierarchy is that of hearing; the ears have the second most noble position among the sensory organs, hearing can perceive sound from all directions, and in this ability it exceeds sight, but hearing cannot perceive its object at so great a distance as the eye can see, and finally, it is through hearing the word of God that faith and the other virtues are instilled.<sup>21</sup> It is open to abuse as well, so the *viator* must be careful; as sounds coil in the ear, lest the auditive power be confounded, the mind ought to observe the circumstances in which the horrific sound of the Devil and the world is to be expelled and the hearing of the sweet sound of the spirit to be enjoyed: 'For the hearing of slanders, lies, blasphemy and the others of this sort [of speech] by the devout soul is horrendous, but the hearing of the words of the Lord which sound the opposite, is sweet'.<sup>22</sup> The dangers of words are apparent here, as they can lead to both sin and virtue. There is also a strong social element to hearing, as the words of the devil, for instance, turn humans against one another: 'For in fact, the Devil, both the worst murmurer and also the father of lies, suggests to the ears of the *viator* dissension and war'.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, men given over to the world, generally identified by Wyclif as clerics and prelates, cannot hear the Spirit, who is drowned out by the noise of the world and the Devil.<sup>24</sup> To combat this worldliness, we must follow Christ's advice to be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves, which Wyclif explains using a common medieval understanding of the traits of the two animals. The asp, following Psalm 57:6, will not listen to charmers, and, it is said, puts one ear to the ground and stops up the other with its tail; so should we do likewise when we perceive the whispers of the Devil or the world. This is done, Wyclif tells us, by the interior man by contemplating that he is made from the mud of the earth, earth made fragile by the corruption of the humours. Wyclif further explains the wisdom of serpents by reference to a medieval commonplace, the contemplation of death: 'And since nothing is stronger to the mastery of fleshly desire than to contemplate how one will be dead, it is obvious how useful is this serpentine wisdom to a man'.<sup>25</sup> Doves delight in the sound of their own kind, but when

21 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.205/27–36. Cf. *Sermones* vol. 4, 51.402/20–25.

22 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.205/36–206/7. 'Nam auditus detraccionum[,] mendacii, blasphemie et ceterorum huiusmodi devote anime est horrendus, sed auditus verborum Domini que sonant opposita est suavis.'

23 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.206/9–11. 'Diabolus namque et susurro pessimus et pater mendacii suggerit auri viancium dissensionem et bellum . . .'

24 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.206/11–17.

25 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.206/31–207/5. 'Et cum nichil plus valet ad domanda carnis desideria quam pensare qualis erit mortua, patet quantum prodest homini ista prudencia serpentine.' The idea of *memento mori* and life as preparation for death was a stoic idea that

they hear the sound of a hawk or other predatory bird, they rest on a flat rock, against which the bird of prey is scared to dash itself. In the same way, when the faithful are tempted by the Devil or some other enemy, they ought to rest humbly on the corner stone, a reference to Christ, who according to Acts 4:11, *inter alia*, 'is the stone which the builders rejected, which is become the head of the corner', nor should they then fear a man's attack or the Devil's insults.<sup>26</sup>

The third sense, midway between the highest and lowest senses, is smell. The nose is beneath the eyes and ears, and while it can perceive its object at a distance, it can only do so if the wind should carry the scent, and smell does not perceive its object at as great a distance as either sight or hearing perceive theirs.<sup>27</sup> Speaking of odours in a mystical sense, and drawing on a long tradition of Christian thought, Wyclif says that we can say that the sweetness of meritorious deeds and the fetid stench of vile ones reaches up to heaven, whence good angels are said to flee a place of sin because of the stench.<sup>28</sup> The potential for abuse here is that smells can intoxicate us, leading us into gluttony or lust:

For in fact the gluttonous are unduly delighted by sweet-smelling food and the luxurious, what causes shame in women, sumptuously consume snuff and clothes and bed sheets and veils, fragranced with precious perfumes, with [the monetary value of] which a great people might be sustained. And in fact it seems the cause [of lust] is that the stench of a luxurious woman is lessened, and the ardour of a man is eagerly excited [by these perfumes].<sup>29</sup>

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became very important in Christianity, especially for monastics, see de Vögué A., "Avoir la mort devant les yeux chaque jour comme un événement imminent", *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 48 (1986) 267–278. The Christian understanding of death in the Middle Ages was informed to a large extent by the writings of Gregory the Great, see Straw C., "Purity and Death", in Cavadini J.C. (ed.), *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (Notre Dame: 1995) 16–37. This is a theme that Wyclif used elsewhere in his sermons, see *Sermones* vol. 4, 25.220/1–3.

26 *Sermones* vol. 1, 30.207/5–14.

27 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.212/9–17.

28 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.212/18–24. See Classen C. – Howes D. – Synnot A., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London – New York: 1994) 52–54. There is a similar dichotomy at work in Chaucer (see Newhauser R., "Multisensoriality and the Chaucerian Multisensual" elsewhere in this volume) and in Foxe, where God's word is sweet smelling, and heresy emits a stench, see Scheuchzer, "Eate not, taste not, touch not".

29 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.212/26–35. 'Gulosi namque in vecibilibus odoriferis indebite delectantur et luxoriosi quod pudet in feminis consumunt sumptuose in subfumigacionibus ac panorum et lintheorum et flammeolorum odoribus preciosa aromatizancia, cum quibus

The olfactory sense can lead *per accidens* from the carnal sins of gluttony and lust to the spiritual sins of accidia and avarice, just as the other senses can lead in the same way to other sins.<sup>30</sup>

With the fourth sense, that of taste, Wyclif's neat construction begins to break down. Taste's organ is the tongue and the palate, which are situated lower in the head than the preceding senses. It cannot perceive its object from a distance, and, according to (again unnamed) philosophers, the tongue is an organ of touch.<sup>31</sup> Yet, taste should be differentiated from touch for they are different types of sense, although the proportions of the objects of these senses and the number of their species along with the anatomy of their organs would require a long philosophical discussion to explain, Wyclif tells us, rather awkwardly sidestepping the issue of multisensoriality inherent in the physical functioning of taste.<sup>32</sup> That Wyclif feels the need for any sort of explanation of the differentiation of the two senses demonstrates the inherent ambiguity of a hierarchical sensorium, but his explanation leaves much to be desired and very little for his reader to go on. The focus, as usual, is on the moral implications of sensuality; it suffices, Wyclif goes on, to note that it is not delight in taste *per se* that leads to sin, but neglect in divine service arising from this sense, as, for example, when Esau sinned through this sense by selling his birthright (Genesis 25:30). The *viator* ought, therefore, to take as much food and drink as promotes divine service, both as far as quantity and quality, and that is enough.<sup>33</sup> Wyclif interprets the story of the meal at Bethany (John 12:1–11) to mean that the use of precious things ought to be regulated by reason. During the meal, Christ's anointing with precious spikenard, and subsequent questioning by Judas, whose motives of greed are clear, serve as subtext for Wyclif to rebuke traitors of the church, such as the mendicant orders. Wyclif says that the servants of Christ ought to serve a most subtle and precious mix, but the gluttonous must beware of taking too much food or food of too high a quality. Since this happens easily, the best defence is to subject the judgement of sense to that of reason, so John the Baptist and his followers did well by abstaining, but Christ and his followers did better by consuming precious food according

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magnus populus poterit sustentari. Et revera causa videtur ut feto luxuriantis femine mitigatur et ardor viri avidius excitetur.'

30 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.213/1–6.

31 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.213/16–20. That taste is a kind of touch is an Aristotelian idea: see Aristotle, *De anima*, 422a8–10.

32 On medieval multisensual constructions and the education of the senses, see Newhauser R., "Chaucerian Multisensual".

33 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.213/20–34.



to the rule of reason. The mendicant (*privata*) orders are seen, then, to be blind in their superadding to this rule of reason vows and rules of abstinence.<sup>34</sup>

The final and most material sense is that of touch, which 'is a subjective, apprehensive power in the greater part of the body, rightly called nerves of touch by philosophers. Whence a nervous body is more sensitive in this sense'.<sup>35</sup> Once more this sense is open to abuse, having a propensity to err in lustful acts, as in embraces, kisses and the act of procreation. This itch can be avoided by punishing the body and by occupying oneself with mathematics, astronomy or other insensible things.<sup>36</sup>

Wyclif's discussions about the sins of the tongue in the *Sermones* are closely related to his moralizing of the bodily senses. This makes a good deal of sense, since this was a popular topic in medieval pastoral literature, William Peraldus, for instance, devoting a section to these sins in his *Summa de vitiis*,<sup>37</sup> since speech was sometimes numbered in the sensorium,<sup>38</sup> and since the tongue serves both as the organ of taste and the organ of speech. It is also especially in light of these sins, when considered in relation to Wyclif's conception of the sensorium and the organs of sense, that his schema is undermined. These sins were highly important in Wyclif's hamartiology, and he speaks of them in his sermons on several occasions. In a sermon on the Epistle for the Third Sunday of Lent, Wyclif mentions that there are small sins that should not be mentioned to the faithful. This is perhaps an indication that this sermon was meant for a clerical audience, since he mentions three of these sins, including two of the tongue. The first of these sins might also be considered a sin of the tongue (or at least the mouth), but it is more properly a sin associated with touch, although, as we have seen, these two senses are closely related. This

34 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.213/34–214/15.

35 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.214/16–20. 'est [...] vis apprehensiva subiectata in corpore retili per maiorem partem corporis expanso, et hoc recte vocatur apud philosophos nervus tactus. Unde corpora nervosa sunt plus sensibilia isto sensu.'

36 *Sermones* vol. 1, 31.214/20–27.

37 Siegfried Wenzel has made an edition of the text of this section available online at: <http://www.unc.edu/~swenzel/Sins%20of%20the%20tongue%20trial.html> (accessed 31 March 2014), which he prepared from the 1688 Lyons edition of Peraldus. A new, critical edition of the *Summa de vitiis* is in preparation by Wenzel, Richard Newhauser, Bridget K. Balint and Edwin Craun. See Casagrande C. – Vecchio S., *Les péchés de la langue: Discipline et éthique de la parole dans la culture médiévale*, trans. P. Baillet (Paris: 1991) 87–112. Wyclif knew Peraldus' work and used it extensively, see Loserth J., *Johann von Wiclif und Guilelmus Peraldus: Studien zur Geschichte der Entstehung von Wiclifs Summa Theologiae* (Vienna: 1916).

38 Woolgar, *The Senses in Later Medieval England* 10–12 and *passim*.



first sin is immodesty, 'which is in kisses and embraces of women' ('que est in oculis et amplexibus mulierum'); the second is foolish speech, 'in flattery and inciting to lust and vengeance' ('in verbis blandis et incitativis ad luxuriam et vindictam'); and the third is scurrility, 'which rests in superfluous and dishonest words' ('que stat in verbis superfluis et inhonestis'). These three do not pertain to salvation; rather they distract from it and incline toward base things. Instead, the soul ought to be occupied with spiritual things, and if one speaks, it should be redolent of the Saviour's ministry.<sup>39</sup>

Another sin of the tongue, lying, is especially important to Wyclif, and there is some equivalence between lying and sinning: 'Lying, according to Anselm and others, can be taken analogously for any sin whatsoever, since in as much as a man sins, he is a liar, just as Satan, the opponent of truth, is the father of lies not only in himself but in any sinner whatsoever'.<sup>40</sup> Wyclif gives a familiar etymology in support of this claim: 'And the reason is, because to lie is to go against the mind (*mentiri est contra mentum ire*), and [because] in the mind is necessarily that first truth [i.e. God], it appears that either no one can go against God or contradict himself, or a man as much as he sins is against the truth'.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, since every necessary thing expresses itself, according to the principles of Augustine, so every liar or sinner says that he has both an obligation and a debt of service to his God, and since in so far as he sins, he revolts against God, who is Truth, it is clear that insomuch as he sins, he lies.<sup>42</sup> Likewise every person who sins goes against his own mind, and therefore

39 *Sermones* vol. 3, 21.167/11–21.

40 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.461/27–31. 'Mendacium autem in sua analogia secundum Anselmum et alios pro peccato quolibet potest sumi, cum quanto homo peccaverit, est mendax, quomodo satanas contrarius veritati est pater mendacii non solum in se ipso sed in quolibet peccatore.'

41 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.461/31–35. 'Et ratio est, quia cum mentiri contra mentem ire et in mente illa sit necessario prima veritas, patet quod vel nemo potest ire contra Deum vel esse sibi contrarius, vel homo de quanto peccat est contrarius veritati.' This etymology was common in the Middle Ages, used for instance by Alexander Carpenter, Jean de La Rochelle, and Thomas Aquinas, see Craun E., *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge – New York: 1997) 37–47.

42 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.461/36–39. This passage contains two lacunae in the Wyclif Society edition, which can be filled by reference to Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Guelph Collection 306, f. 173vb and Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Guelph Collection 565, ff. 271vb–272ra: 'Similiter, cum quelibet res <neccesitas dicit se ipsam secundum principia Augustini, et omnes menticus uel peccatas> dicit se ipsam naturaliter et obligacionem et debitum servicium Deo suo, et cum in quantum peccat <ab illo deficit, patet quod in quantum peccavit> est mentitus.'

against his own conscience, which naturally desires beatitude, so it is obvious that every sinner is a liar in this way.<sup>43</sup> The vocalization of lies is to be judged lightly unless it is first in the mind and discordant to man's obligation to God, because lying generally exists in the operations and passions of the soul before being spoken.<sup>44</sup> Lying is such a serious matter according to Augustine, Anselm and others, with whom Wyclif agrees wholeheartedly, that we should not do it to save the human race nor the whole world.<sup>45</sup>

The connection between the physical attributes of the tongue and sins of this member is made in another sermon, thus paralleling the hierarchical structure of the senses and their association with particular vices which we have already seen. The tongue has four natural offices deputed to it according to Wyclif: to taste food, to place food between the teeth, to form the voice to the end of friendly communion with neighbours in speech, and especially to praise God and invoke His help, 'but alas, all these are turned to their contrary by diabolical poison. For the infected tongue does not taste the word of scripture (which is the food of the soul), but falls into scurrilities and foul speech, slanders and flatteries. And that venom pouring forth into the world sows all evil.'<sup>46</sup> The double capacity of speech is easily recognized here; just as the tongue is specially designated to praise God and ask for His help, so also it is capable of 'sowing all evil'; since it can do the opposite of all of its natural functions. Wyclif develops a metaphor here concerning the first office of the tongue, to taste; a tongue that is poisoned by scurrilous language can no longer discern the taste of the food its soul needs to survive – scripture.<sup>47</sup>

The other three offices of the tongue are taken up in the same manner. The tongue ought to speak, distribute and teach edifying opinions about those absent and not give back trifles or unfruitful opinions about neighbours;<sup>48</sup> we ought to ruminate on words 'to the edification of [our] neighbour, as Augustine teaches, inscribing at the back of his hall, not apocryphal stories in sumptuous cloth, but these two lines: "Whoever likes to gnaw at the lives of those absent /

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43 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.462/1–4.

44 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.462/4–9.

45 *Sermones* vol. 3, 53.462/31–33.

46 *Sermones* vol. 4, 26.228/4–15. 'Sed heu veneno diabolico omnia ista ad contrarium sunt eversa. Nam lingua infecta non gustat verbum scripture (quod est cibus anime), sed prolabitur in scurrilitates et turpiloquia, detracciones et adulaciones. Et istud venenum diffusum in mundo seminat omne malum.'

47 Compare this with Foxe's description of William Tyndale's 'taste of God's truth' as discussed in Scheuchzer, "Eate not, taste not, touch not".

48 *Sermones* vol. 4, 26.228/25–27.

Will know that at this table there is no place for him".<sup>49</sup> The third office is specifically to use speech in a friendly manner with neighbours, a thing which birds and beasts do, to the limits of their nature, but a thing which humans do not, instead committing innumerable frauds and the like against their neighbours; therefore by perverting the ordination of God, they become infinitely worse than birds, since they damnably pervert the order instituted by God, which is a condition worse than anything that can happen to an irrational creature.<sup>50</sup> The overturning of the final office, changing the praise of God into blasphemy, is understood in terms of the commandment against taking the Lord's name in vain, and the violation of this commandment is taken to cause a visceral reaction: 'For all taking the name of God in vain is blasphemy [...] in detestation of which sin men become accustomed to spit because of the horror'.<sup>51</sup>

One other sermon outlines three sins of the tongue: murmuring against God, slander, which we have already seen, and mockery/abuse. The first of these is simply called foolishness, and the third is barely mentioned, but the treatment of the second is interesting in that Wyclif uses animal imagery, which was a commonplace in medieval literature on sins of the tongue, although Wyclif says that these images are drawn from scripture. Wyclif describes the slanderer as like a dog, a pig, and a serpent. A slanderer is like a dog because a dog has bloody lips, commonly barks without cause, and possesses a prostrate nature. S/he is like a pig because a pig shamelessly stains its snout and mouth, when entering a garden prefers a pile of turds to a bunch of fragrant flowers, and puts its feet into its food. Finally, s/he is like a serpent because a serpent bites from hiding, advances tortuously, and eats earth.<sup>52</sup> These qualities of dogs and pigs are used in much the same way in a collection of *distinctiones*<sup>53</sup> identified by Edwin Craun, where the pig is said to stick his mouth as readily as his foot into

49 *Sermones* vol. 4, 26.229/29–33. '[...] igitur rumemus verba ad edificacionem proximi, ut docet Augustinus, scribens in dorso aule sue non historias ypocriphas in pannis sumptuosos sed hos versus: *Quisque novit dictis absentum rodere vitam/ Hanc mensam indignam noverit esse sibi.*'

50 *Sermones* vol. 4, 26.229/34–230/6.

51 *Sermones* vol. 4, 26.231/5–11. 'Omnis enim vane assumens nomen Dei est blasphemus [...] in cuius peccati detestacionem solent homines spuere propter horrorem.'

52 *Sermones* vol. 4, 52.30–37.

53 *Distinctiones* began as lists of the different senses of a term in scripture, but were not confined to scriptural terms, often being drawn from 'moralized bestiaries and collections of *proprietas rerum*', d'Avray D., *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: 1985) 72–75, see also Rouse R.H. – Rouse M.A., "Biblical Distinctions in the Thirteenth Century", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 41 (1974)

filth; has his mouth open for dung, but not for flowers, and adds that a 'pig is disdained because of the grain it has in its mouth'. The dog is likewise said to have bloody lips.<sup>54</sup> The differences are slight; Wyclif includes a characteristic of the pig which the collection does not and misses one that the collection includes. The *distinctiones* also include more material relating to the dog and the serpent. So, while Wyclif did not necessarily consult this particular collection of *distinctiones*, it is not unlikely that he drew his material from some such collection, even with his stated aversion to the use of *exempla* and other non-biblical material.<sup>55</sup>

Wyclif's hierarchy of the senses breaks down somewhat, especially in its discussion of the senses of taste and touch, and this for three reasons. First, we have seen that there was some discussion amongst philosophers as to whether or not the sense of taste was a species of touch, so the scientific understanding was ambiguous. Second, the relation of the five senses to the seven capital vices could never be neat; seven into five or five into seven will always give a fraction or remainder. And third, the most important moral implications of human beings existing as sensitive creatures, that we can use them for both good and ill, best exemplified, in my opinion, in the offices of the tongue and their subversion, defies easy categorization within a simple schema of five senses. What Wyclif is left with, then, is an ordered chaos; the senses and their moralization remain something with which to struggle, just as the senses themselves have to be tamed and controlled in order to avoid the temptations that lead so easily to sin. This is entirely conventional and well within the bounds of medieval traditions of the moral understanding of the bodily senses, both homiletic and otherwise,<sup>56</sup> and we have seen that Wyclif draws heavily on these traditions. It is the very conventionality of Wyclif's construction that is noteworthy. That Wyclif's construction and moralization of the sensorium absorbs the traditions of medieval thought is another indication of Wyclif's participation in the *mentalité* of his age, and another blow to the Protestant and Catholic historiographical myths that have informed so much of the scholarly understanding of Wyclif and his thought.

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27–37 and Rouse R.H. – Rouse M.A., *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto: 1979) 7–11.

54 Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity* 68–69.

55 On this topic, see Auski P., "Wyclif's Sermons and the Plain Style", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 66 (1975) 5–23.

56 See Casagrande C. – Vecchio S., *Histoire des péchés capitaux au moyen âge*, trans. P.-E. Dauzat (Paris: 2003) 275–337.

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## The Senses and Human Nature in a Political Reading of *Paradise Lost*

*Jens Martin Gurr*

Milton, so far as I know, is the first to turn to the story of the Fall to explain the failure of a revolution.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Let us begin with what seems a politically inconspicuous passage on the five senses. Here is Adam, lecturing Eve on reason, fancy and the senses:

But know that in the soul  
Are many lesser faculties that serve  
Reason as chief; among these fancy next  
Her office holds; of all external things,  
Which the five watchful senses represent,  
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,  
Which reason joining or disjoining, frames  
All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion [...].<sup>2</sup>

What we find here is a rather standard early modern understanding of the relationship between reason, fancy and the senses.<sup>3</sup> But what is illuminating is the way in which this discussion is metaphorically politicized by means of the body politic analogy: the relations among the inner faculties, as so often in Milton, are rendered in the political terminology of rule, domination and

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1 Hill Ch., *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: 1977) 352.

2 Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler A., 2nd ed. (London: 1998) v, 100–108. Further references by book and verse will be to this edition.

3 For this as ‘a fairly straightforward account of Aristotelian faculty psychology’, cf. Moshenska J., “‘Transported Touch’: The Sense of Feeling in Milton’s Eden”, *English Literary History* 79, 1 (2012) 1–31, 24, n. 8.



subservience.<sup>4</sup> This conflation of mental and political hierarchies, this politicization of the senses, I will argue, is central to an understanding of Milton's anthropology and its role in a political reading of *Paradise Lost*. I here follow Walker, who has argued that, '[t]hough there is considerable disagreement amongst historians of political thought over what the republican view of human nature is, there is [...] strong agreement *that* a view on this issue is a major premise in republican argumentation about politics'.<sup>5</sup> Walker compares Milton's views to the tradition of republican thought (Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli) and adduces a number of the key passages from *Paradise Lost* that I also discuss, but the importance of Milton's anthropological convictions and his image of human nature for a reading of the epic in the light of the English Revolution remains to be established.

While there are by now innumerable readings of Milton's politics in *Paradise Lost* on the one hand and, on the other, a number of recent contributions on the senses in the poem,<sup>6</sup> the connection between the senses and the politics of *Paradise Lost* has remained largely unexplored. What I hope to do here is to add to the debate about a political reading of *Paradise Lost* by looking at the role of the senses and the assessment of human nature developed in the text.

I will argue that the key to a political reading lies in an anthropological discussion in which Milton breaks loose from the moorings of his earlier optimism and sets out on a probing exploration of the problems at the heart of any liberalism. This exploration will be shown to revolve around the problematic nature of the senses and their relationship to reason. More specifically, I will argue that the senses are politicized by means of the body politic analogy: the internal hierarchies of reason, senses and passions are rendered with remarkable consistency in the *political* terminology of domination and subservience.

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4 Cf. also *Paradise Lost* III, 176–177, VII, 546 (Raphael admonishes Adam to 'govern well thy appetite' and to 'take heed lest Passion sway / Thy Judgment to do aught, which else free Will / Would not admit' [VIII, 635–37]), IX, 351–356; for these passages cf. also Walker W., "Human Nature in Republican Tradition and *Paradise Lost*", *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10, 1 (2004) 6.1–44 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/10-1/walkmilt.htm>> (accessed May 15, 2013), § 25, who, however, discusses them purely as referring to the human faculties and does not comment on the body politic metaphor or on political implications here.

5 Walker, "Human Nature in Republican Tradition and *Paradise Lost*" § 2; emphasis added.

6 Cf. especially Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" and Gabel's essay on Milton's "Hierarchies of Vision" in this volume.

I take my cues from interpretations such as those developed by Christopher Hill and Andrew Milner, who both read *Paradise Lost* (like *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*) as centrally concerned with the sense of utter defeat of the revolutionary cause after the Restoration of 1660.<sup>7</sup> But what I wish to highlight is the role of Milton's anthropology and particularly his view of the senses and their relationship to reason in such a political reading. I especially concur with Hill's reading on many points; however, though he argues that 'the Revolution had utterly failed [...] because the men were not great enough for the Cause',<sup>8</sup> I regard Milton's critique of Cromwell in *Paradise Lost* as far more devastating than Hill and, more importantly, I believe that Milton's anthropological views, as they become explicit especially in some of his later prose works and as they are developed in the Adam and Eve relationship, are far more central to a reading of the political subtext of *Paradise Lost* than they are in previous accounts of the poem.

Rather than being an apology for the Revolution, as the classic 'left-wing Satanist' reading maintains, *Paradise Lost* is the account of the failure of a revolution: both in the English Revolution and in Milton's epic, political idealism clashes with anthropological realities. First, however, we briefly need to consider Milton's view of Cromwell and of the revolutionary leaders generally as providing one side of his account.

### **'One Shall Rise / Of Proud Ambitious Heart': Milton's View of the Revolutionary Leaders**

A number of more recent commentators have used both Milton's prose and his oblique but striking allusions in *Paradise Lost* as well as *Paradise Regained* to argue that the poet was far more critical of Cromwell than has been generally acknowledged, especially by previous adherents to a political reading of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>9</sup> I have already discussed this at some length

7 Cf. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* and Milner A., *John Milton and the English Revolution: A Study in the Sociology of Literature* (London: 1981); cf. also Hill Ch., *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: 1984).

8 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 367.

9 For a representative earlier example, cf. Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution*, who also reads Milton as uncritically defending Cromwell throughout and thus does not comment on the double logic of Milton's oblique account of the English Revolution. For more balanced assessments of Milton's increasingly critical views of Cromwell,

elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> As an example, let us take a passage from the *History of Britain*, begun in 1647 but not published until 1671. Here we find fairly drastic criticism of the revolutionary leaders who have proven to be ‘unfit’:

Thus they who of late were extoll'd as our greatest Deliverers, and had the People wholly at their Devotion, by so discharging their Trust as we see, did not only weaken and unfit themselves to be dispensers of what Liberty they pretended, but unfitted also to the People, now grown worse and more disordinate, to receive or to digest any Liberty at all.<sup>11</sup>

The most astonishing reference to Cromwell, however, is the following passage from the Archangel Michael's account to Adam of the future of mankind in book XII of *Paradise Lost*, a passage which (if it is read politically at all) is commonly taken to refer to Charles I:<sup>12</sup>

[...] one shall rise  
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content  
With fair equality, fraternal state,

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cf. Woolrych A., “Milton & Cromwell: ‘A Short but Scandalous Night of Interruption’”, in Lieb M. – Shawcross J.T. (eds.), *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on the Prose of John Milton* (Amherst: 1974) 185–218, Dzelzainis M., “Milton and the Protectorate of 1658”, in Armitage D. – Himy A. – Skinner Q. (eds.), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: 1995) 181–205, Norbrook D., *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge 1999) 326–337, and especially Worden's study, Worden B., *Literature and Politics in Cromwell's England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: 2007); here, cf. particularly chapters 13 (“Milton and the Protectorate”, 289–325), 14 (“Milton and the Good Old Cause”, 326–357), 16 (“Milton and the Fall of England”, 384–398).

- 10 For an overview of key readings, cf. my earlier essay, on which my discussion in this essay is based: “When Upstart Passions Catch the Government”: Political and Mental Hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*, in Gurr, *The Human Soul as Battleground: Variations on Dualism and the Self in English Literature* (Heidelberg: 2003) 81–103.
- 11 Milton John, “Mr John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament in 1641”, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 5.1, 439–451, 448 [first printed in 1681 as a digression in Milton's *History of Britain*].
- 12 Cf. for instance Lewalski B.K., “*Paradise Lost* and Milton's Politics”, in Evans J.M. (ed.), *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (New York – London 2002) vol. 4, 213–240, 228; Loewenstein D., “The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*”, in Corns Th.S. (ed.), *A Companion to Milton* (Oxford: 2001) 348–361, 357ff.; Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 463.

Will arrogate dominion undeserved  
 Over his brethren, and quite dispossess  
 Concord and law of nature from the earth [...]
 [F]rom heaven claiming second sovereignty;  
 And from rebellion shall derive his name,  
 Though of rebellion others he accuse.<sup>13</sup>

Given Milton's repeated reference to Cromwell's ambition, and given Cromwell's constant invocation of divine authority – worthy of a Stuart monarch –, the implication leads to Cromwell. In addition, the arrogation of dominion over one's 'brethren' is much more resonant when interpreted as a reference to a Puritan republican as ruling over his brethren equals than to a Stuart monarch.

When, despite his overly positive assessment of Milton's view of Cromwell and the Revolution, Hill states that '[b]lame for its failure, in Milton's eyes, rested with its leaders', this is no doubt partly true.<sup>14</sup> But if we take *Paradise Lost* seriously as containing Milton's account of a failed Revolution, it also has another story to tell. A further problem contributing to the failure of the Revolution, I contend, is a much more fundamental anthropological one.

### 'By Nature Slaves, and Arrant Beasts': The Senses, Licence and Liberty in Milton's View of 'the People' in his Prose Works

The ideal form of government – and the one that would allow for the maximum degree of freedom –, Milton claims in the "Readie and Easie Way to

13 Milton, *Paradise Lost* XII, 24–37; cf. also XII, 64–78.

14 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 379; cf. also 375ff. and Fowler's annotation on IX, 482–488: 'Eve's fall may additionally typify the tragedy of a people betrayed by its leaders', Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: 1998). In one of the best contributions on Milton's republicanism, Dzelzainis similarly argues that '[f]or a committed Republican like Milton [...] the republic collapsed not because republicanism was intrinsically inferior to other forms of government, but because its proponents had failed to keep faith with its guiding principles. [...] It was therefore possible to provide a coherent account of the failure of the republic in republican terms, and it follows from this that Milton [would have regarded] these events as a confirmation [...] of his fundamental convictions', Dzelzainis, "Milton and the Protectorate" 182. For an extremely subtle republican reading, cf. also Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, ch. 10, "Paradise Lost and English Republicanism" (433–495).

Establish a Free Commonwealth", would be a republic 'where no single person, but reason only swaies'.<sup>15</sup> Barbara Kiefer Lewalski summarizes Milton's view on the subject as follows:

Like others in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli, [Milton] believed that kinds of government – monarchy, aristocracy, democracy – must conform to the nature of the people, and that people get the government they deserve and are fit for. [...] [Monarchy] is a debased form of government only suited to a servile, debased people. Properly, government should be shared among the large body of worthy citizens who are virtuous and love liberty [...].<sup>16</sup>

This interdependence of the citizens' individual reason and virtue on the one hand and the freedom a nation is capable of attaining and maintaining on the other hand, is indeed fundamental also to *Paradise Lost*.<sup>17</sup> The possibility of freedom, Milton argues in both his prose and his poetry, depends on the ability of the people to be reasonable, to control their senses and restrain their passions: 'Liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by Just and Vertuous Men, to bad and dissolute, it becomes a mischief unweildy [sic] in their own hands'.<sup>18</sup> It seems, however, that as the 1650s wore on, Milton progressively lost faith in the moral and intellectual capabilities of his compatriots. This is what we need to study now, first in the prose works, then in *Paradise Lost*.

In *Eikonoklastes*, his 1649 defence of the regicide, Milton expressed his disgust at the popular reception of the idolatrously royalist *Eikon Basilike*. He here speaks of the people as an 'inconstant, irrational and Image-doting rabble' and 'a credulous and hapless herd [...] enchanted with these popular institutes of Tyranny' and denounces his countrymen as 'by nature slaves, and arrant beasts; not fitt for that liberty which they cri'd out and bellow'd for, but fitter to be led

15 Milton John, "The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth and The Excellence therof Compar'd with the Inconveniences and Dangers of Readmitting Kingship in this Nation" [2nd ed., April 1660], in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 7, 407–463, 427.

16 Lewalski, "Milton's Politics" 214f.; cf. also 228 *et passim* for the correspondence between inner liberty and political liberty; for the connection between individual and state, cf. also Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwell's England* 320f., 392 *et passim*.

17 Cf. for example Milton, *Paradise Lost* VI, 176; IX, 351ff; XI, 83ff.

18 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448.

back again into thir old servitude, like a sort of clamouring & fighting brutes'.<sup>19</sup> In the "Defence of the People of England" of February 1651, he laments the 'stubborn struggles of the wicked citizens' and complains that kings were able to 'shelter [...] themselves behind the blind superstitions of the mob'.<sup>20</sup> In one of the more striking of his vulgophobic outbursts he rails: 'what a miserable, credulous, deluded thing that creature is, which is call'd the Vulgar', to whom he ascribes 'a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit'.<sup>21</sup> In the "The Readie and Easie Way", his last fierce and desperate argument against the Restoration during the last chaotic weeks of the Commonwealth, he advocated restricted franchise and an oligarchy to keep the mob in check.<sup>22</sup>

Hill rightly argues that '[f]or Milton liberty is licence, tending to anarchy, unless it is tempered by a recognition of God's purposes'.<sup>23</sup> And his belief in the reason of the populace to acknowledge and follow just these 'God's purposes' seems to have been limited to begin with and to have waned entirely as the 1650s wore on. Trubowitz even goes so far as to argue that 'Milton's later writings are marked by a profound contempt for the English people'.<sup>24</sup>

Let us turn to *Paradise Lost* and a reading of Milton's assessment of the 'licence and liberty problem' and the hierarchy of the faculties.

### 'For Understanding Ruled Not': The Politics of Edenic Hierarchies

This is not the place to attempt to add to centuries and libraries of discussion about Milton's account of Adam's and Eve's relationship and of the Fall itself. I am only concerned here with Milton's discussion of the proper relationship of the faculties, particularly of the senses and passions as opposed to reason, insofar as that is relevant to a political reading.

In the very first view we get of Adam and Eve in book IV, there seems to be a distinction in the attribution of the faculties of mind and body to Adam and Eve respectively:

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- 19 Milton John, "Eikonoklastes: In Answer to a Book Intitl'd Eikon Basilike, The Portrature of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings", in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 3, 337–601; 601, 581.
  - 20 Milton John, "A Defence of the People of England in Answer to Salmasius's Defence of the King", in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 4.1, 301–537; 316f., 521f.
  - 21 Milton, "Eikonoklastes" 426, 344.
  - 22 Milton, "Readie and Easie Way" 458ff.
  - 23 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 267.
  - 24 Trubowitz R.J., "Body Politics in *Paradise Lost*", *PMLA* 121, 2 (2006) 388–404, 390.

For contemplation he and valor formed,  
 For softness she and sweet attractive grace,  
 He for God only, she for God in him.<sup>25</sup>

This distinction is confirmed by Eve in her account of her first encounter with Adam just after her creation and after she has seen her own reflection in the pond. She too affirms the superiority of 'wisdom' over 'beauty':

I yielded, and from that time see  
 How beauty is excelled by manly grace  
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.<sup>26</sup>

Though this seemingly simple and traditional conception of gender hierarchies, to be sure, is complicated and undermined in numerous ways,<sup>27</sup> Eve here affirms what is discursively explicit throughout much of *Paradise Lost*, namely male superiority through superior intellect. But although Adam tells Raphael

For well I understand in the prime end  
 Of Nature her th'inferior, in the mind  
 And inward faculties [...],<sup>28</sup>

he is not able to maintain his superiority in the face of 'her loveliness'.<sup>29</sup> Passion interferes and subjects 'all higher knowledge' to its rule.<sup>30</sup> This is again made plain in the Archangel Raphael's admonitions not to confuse 'love' with 'subjection' in moments of passionate 'transports':

For what admir'st thou so, what transports thee so,  
 An outside? Fair no doubt, and worthy well  
 Thy cherishing, thy honouring and thy love,  
 Not thy subjection [...].<sup>31</sup>

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25 Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV, 297–299.

26 Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV, 489ff.

27 For a detailed discussion, cf. Wittreich J.A., *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: 1987); for a brief but insightful discussion, cf. Lewalski "Milton's Politics" 232–234; cf. also Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 480–484.

28 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 540ff.

29 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 547.

30 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 551.

31 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 567–570.



Raphael exhorts him not to allow sexuality – shared by ‘cattle and each beast’ – to ‘subdue’ his soul; sexuality is here tellingly referred to as the ‘sense of touch’:

But if the sense of touch whereby mankind  
Is propagated seem such dear delight  
Beyond all other, think the same vouchsafed  
To cattle and each beast, which would not be  
To them made common and divulged, if aught  
Therein enjoyed were worthy to subdue  
The soul of man, and passion in him move.<sup>32</sup>

Commenting on Adam’s preoccupation with touch and its impact on gender hierarchies, Rogers incisively argues that ‘touch is that sensation that compels Adam to forget the divine marriage commandment, the arbitrary decree by which he was appointed Eve’s superior’.<sup>33</sup> Deploying the classic Platonic and Neoplatonic image of the *gradatio amoris*, God’s messenger then again draws the sharp distinction between laudable ‘love’ as associated with ‘reason’ and contemptible ‘passion’ as associated with the senses and the body, and holds out the prospect of an ascension to an angelic state of ‘heavenly love’ as opposed to a debasing state of being ‘sunk in carnal pleasure’:

In loving thou dost well, in Passion not,  
Wherein true love consists not; love refines  
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat  
In reason, and is judicious, is the scale  
By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend,  
Not sunk in carnal pleasure [...].<sup>34</sup>

In a 2012 article in *ELH* Moshenska perceptively comments on this passage by taking his cue from Barbara Lewalski, who has pointed out the role of Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* as a source here. Ficino consistently refers

32 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 579–585.

33 Rogers J., “‘Transported Touch’: The Fruit of Marriage in *Paradise Lost*”, in Martin C.G. (ed.), *Milton and Gender* (Cambridge: 2004) 115–132, 128. I owe this reference to Moshenska, “The Sense of Feeling” 25.

34 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 588ff.

to touch as the most problematic sense.<sup>35</sup> Here Moshenska's observation is highly significant:

The fact that Adam's touching of Eve proceeds directly from sight – 'transported I *behold* / Transported touch' – is also perturbing on Ficinian terms: beholding is supposed to lead upward, to rational contemplation. In the sixth speech of Ficino's *Commentary*, Tomasso Benci claims that 'every love begins with sight. But the love of the contemplative man ascends from sight to intellect. That of the voluptuous man descends from sight to touch' (Ficino 119).<sup>36</sup>

Moshenska persuasively, I think, argues that Milton infinitely complicates the assessment and evaluation of 'touch' – neither is it predominantly sexual nor is sex imagined to be excluded at all: 'Sexual touch is included without being either effaced or over-emphasized: like other acts of touch, it simply takes its place within the thousand decencies of shared Edenic life without being granted special precedence'.<sup>37</sup> Given this insight, it is hard to see why Moshenska then sees a contradiction in Raphael's account: 'Even though Raphael has already stated that the angels share in all of the human senses, it seems almost incomprehensible, after he has so sternly objected to human touch, that angels could partake in it at all'.<sup>38</sup> The point, however, is not that Raphael admonishes Adam not to have sex! It is important to note that this is no simple dismissal of the sense of touch as inherently 'base' or 'primitive'; in the logic of the epic, there is nothing *per se* problematic in the senses and their use, even their enjoyment: angels as well as humans 'both contain / Within them every lower faculty / Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste'.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as the discussion of angelic love-life in book VIII makes clear,<sup>40</sup> sex itself is perfectly innocent if balanced by intellectual pursuits. Thus, there is nothing wrong with the sense of touch in itself (or with sexual pleasure, even in prelapsarian Eden<sup>41</sup>); touch only becomes problematic when the senses overpower reason.

35 Cf. Lewalski B.K., *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: 1985) 214–215 and Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" 5.

36 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 25, n. 17.

37 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 19.

38 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 7.

39 Milton, *Paradise Lost* v, 409–411. For a detailed discussion of the distinction between the angelic and the human sense of vision (both physical sight and spiritual insight), cf. Gabel's essay in this volume.

40 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 618–629.

41 Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" 6.

Given the centrality of reason to liberty in Milton's politics *and* theology, it is surprising, I believe, that Moshenska, like many other critics commenting on Milton's discussion of the senses, does not comment on the political implications of these anthropological discussions. Curiosity, passion, envy, hate: according to Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* as well as in *Paradise Lost*, all factors in the Fall of Satan as well as Adam and Eve are sinful in that they are departures from reason.<sup>42</sup> As far as the anthropological implications of the Fall are concerned, Christopher Ricks has argued that Milton sought to dissolve the 'dichotomy between body and spirit'.<sup>43</sup> However, I have been arguing that Milton very firmly upholds the dichotomy: he merely dissolves the clear attribution of body to Eve and spirit to Adam. But although *Paradise Lost* undermines a one-to-one correspondence of Adam with reason and Eve with body, Milton's frequent stress on her beauty and his capacity for contemplation at least echo the traditional allegorical readings of the Fall, as A.B. Chambers has shown in an overview of Milton's sources and his reliance mainly on the reading of St Augustine.<sup>44</sup> One such allegorical reading was known to him in the form of Thomas Aquinas's summary of St Augustine, a reading ultimately going back to Philo Judaeus:

In every sin we discover the same order as in the first temptation. For, according to Augustine, the temptation begins with concupiscence of sin by the sensuality, signified by the serpent; reaches to the lower reason by pleasure, signified by the woman; and extends to the higher reason by consent to the sin, signified by the man.<sup>45</sup>

However, whether it is passion, pity, or uxoriousness that causes Adam's Fall (as commentators in the considerable critical debate over the question have variously maintained), Diekhoff rightly remarks that the dialogue with Raphael foreshadows Adam's Fall and its cause: an insufficient use of reason to which the senses and the passions they induce are not suitably subjected.<sup>46</sup> Raphael's

42 Cf. book I, chapter XI of *De Doctrina Christiana*.

43 Ricks Ch., "Introduction", in Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Ch. Ricks (New York: 1968) xvii.

44 Cf. Chambers A.B. "The Falls of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*", in Kranidas Th. (ed.), *New Essays on Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: 1969) 118–130.

45 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 11–11, Q. 165, A. 2, quoted and translated in Chambers, "The Falls of Adam and Eve" 128; Chambers also refers to Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII, 12–13, and Philo Judaeus, *De opificio mundi*; cf. Chambers, 128.

46 Diekhoff J.S., *Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York: 1946) 64ff.

earlier admonitions are then closely echoed in the Son's reproaches to Adam *after* the Fall:

Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey  
 Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,  
 Superior, or but equal, that to her  
 Thou didst resign thy manhood and the place  
 Wherein God set thee above her [...]   
 [...] whose perfection far excelled  
 Hers in all real dignity? Adorned  
 She was indeed, and lovely to attract  
 Thy love, not thy subjection, and her gifts  
 Were such as under government well seemed,  
 Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part  
 And person hadst thou known thyself aright.<sup>47</sup>

In the post-lapsarian state of Adam and Eve, the subjection of passion and the senses to reason is yet once more brought home as having been the central sin and fault. The inversion of the classic Platonic hierarchy of the faculties is here again tellingly depicted in a blend of political and psychological terms:

For understanding ruled not, and the will  
 Heard not her lore, both in subjection now  
 To sensual appetite, who from beneath  
 Usurping over sovereign reason claimed  
 Superior sway.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion: The Senses, 'the People' and the Politics of Paradise Lost

The anthropology developed in the relationship of Adam and Eve, I would argue, can be read as an expression of Milton's exasperation at the lack of reason and understanding in the populace. The course of the Revolution, it seems, led Milton to shed much of his earlier faith in reason – or more precisely, in the capacity of the majority of his countrymen to use theirs.

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47 Milton, *Paradise Lost* X, 145–156.

48 Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX, 1127–1131.

While it may well be true that Milton's hope in the 1640s for a divinely inspired purgation of England by a revolution that would initiate a rule of the saints did not lead him to believe with Hobbes that a revolution must necessarily result in anarchy and the loss of freedom,<sup>49</sup> the anthropology implicit in the Adam and Eve relationship and explicit in the passages from his later prose works discussed above show that this is precisely what he did believe later on. This, *Paradise Lost* implies, lay at the heart of the failed Revolution: Milton's anthropological realism is at odds with his political idealism. 'Blame for failure lies not in the aims – which were God's, and remain right – but in the English people [...]. Political failure was ultimately moral failure.'<sup>50</sup>

What becomes evident in *Paradise Lost* is not so much just a partisan's disappointment in the collapse of the English Revolution, but a more fundamental insight into the ambitious and unreasonable side of human nature, much as that may have been the cause of Cromwell's disappointment of expectations and of the inability of his countrymen to handle the 'sharp and double edge' of 'Liberty'.<sup>51</sup>

Milton's judgement on the failure of the Revolution in terms of the 'avarice' and 'ambition' of political leaders is to be seen in his assessment of Cromwell: explicitly, if in diplomatically subdued form, in his earlier poetry and prose; implicitly, but even more forcefully, in *Paradise Lost* (and *Paradise Regained*, for that matter). Anthropologically and with reference to his general understanding of man's rational and moral capabilities, the failure of the Revolution is dramatized in Adam and Eve, the people. The following passage, which Milner calls 'almost certainly one of the most important in the poem',<sup>52</sup> uses the analogy of the body and the state to blend subtly the political and anthropological judgements on the 'upstart passions' usurping the government from 'reason', resulting in the loss of freedom:

Since thy original lapse, true liberty  
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells  
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being:  
Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,  
Immediately inordinate desires  
And upstart passions catch the government

49 Cf. Dyson A.E. – Lovelock J., "Introduction", in Dyson A.E. – Lovelock J. (eds.), *Paradise Lost: A Selection of Critical Essays*, 6th ed. (Basingstoke – London: 1986) 11–24, 11.

50 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 350.

51 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448. Cf. above.

52 Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution* 163.

From reason, and to servitude reduce  
 Man till then free. Therefore since he permits  
 Within himself unworthy powers to reign  
 Over free reason, God, in judgement just,  
 Subjects him from without to violent lords;  
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall  
 His outward freedom: tyranny must be,  
 Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse.  
 Yet sometimes nations will decline so low  
 From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,  
 But justice, and some fatal curse annexed  
 Deprives them of their outward liberty,  
 Their inward lost [...].<sup>53</sup>

Milner reads this passage as follows:

the responsibility for the Restoration rests neither with the Stuarts nor with those Independents who had failed to provide adequate political guarantees against the possibility of a Restoration, but rather with that English nation which had declined so low from virtue that it no longer deserved any fate other than that of tyranny.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the passage closely corresponds to one in the “Second Defence of the English People” of 1654 highlighting a nation’s ability to ‘rule and govern itself’ rather than giving in to ‘its own lusts’, a precondition for any form of political liberty: ‘By the customary judgement and, so to speak, just retaliation of God, it happens that a nation which cannot rule and govern itself, but has delivered itself into slavery to its own lusts, is enslaved also to other masters whom it does not choose’.<sup>55</sup>

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53 Milton, *Paradise Lost* XII, 83–101.

54 Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution* 164; cf. also Lewalski, “Milton’s Politics” 228, who argues that this passage ‘accounts for the Stuart Restoration and for absolute monarchy wherever it exists: inner servility leads to deprivation of outward freedom [...] political liberty depends on inner liberty, which is the product of reason and virtue’ [...]; cf. also Hill’s brief if insightful comments, Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 382f.

55 Milton John, “A Second Defence of the English People Against the Base Anonymous Libel, Entitled The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven against the English Parricides” [1654], in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1966) vol. 4.2, 548–686, 684. This passage is also cited by Lewalski in “Milton’s Politics” 215, who does not, however, emphasize Milton’s increasing pessimism about the people’s ability

The fundamental problem of liberty as staged in *Paradise Lost*, then, is the problem of 'licence' and 'liberty', or the inability of the masses responsibly to use their freedom and to subdue their senses and their passions by means of reason. The dialectic of licence and liberty in Milton's social thought finds one of its earliest and most memorable expressions in Sonnet XII (1645/46), in which Milton responds to the attacks against his liberal divorce pamphlets of 1643–45. Here he complains about the

[... ] hogs,  
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,  
And still revolt when truth would set them free.  
License they mean when they cry liberty;  
For who loves that must first be wise and good [...].<sup>56</sup>

Only the 'wise' and the 'good', Milton here maintains, can justly claim liberty – conversely, the argument implicitly but unmistakably continues, the unruly mob has no right to liberty.

In the *History of Britain* Milton similarly argues:

liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by just and virtuous men; to bad and dissolute, it becomes a mischief unwieldy in their own hands: neither is it completely given, but by them who have the happy skill to know what is grievance and unjust to a people, and how to remove it wisely; what good laws are wanting, and how to frame them substantially, that good men may enjoy the freedom which they merit, and the bad the curb which they need.<sup>57</sup>

Milton's understanding of the necessarily different degrees of freedom permissible to different sets of people is virtually indistinguishable from the arguments Edmund Burke advanced over a hundred years later in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly of France", which can be seen as a summary of Burke's anthropology and the necessity for restrictions of freedom he derives from it:

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to restrain themselves but rather his continuing efforts to 'prod, goad, and educate his countrymen' (214).

56 Milton John, "Sonnet XII", in Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. D. Bush, 13th ed. (Oxford: 1992) 173, lines 8–12.

57 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448.



Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites [...]. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.<sup>58</sup>

Unlikely allies that Burke and Milton seem to be, Milton, we may argue, would have fully subscribed to this view of the connection between people's ability to control their senses and rein in their passions on the one hand and the amount of freedom they merit on the other. What connects Milton to Burke, then, is the conflation of political and mental hierarchies: it is precisely in their inability to control the senses and the passions by subjecting them to reason that, according to this view, the majority of people reveal their inability to handle freedom. For Burke, this is the justification for a conservative ideology that does not trust people's reason: 'We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small'.<sup>59</sup> For Milton, this failure exemplified in Adam and Eve and their Fall explains the failure of the people in the English Revolution and thus the failure of the 'Good Old Cause'. Behind both Milton's and Burke's conceptions, of course, there lurks a far older tradition: their consistent conflation of political and psycho-physical hierarchies as well as the notion that the subordination of the senses to reason by analogy implies and calls for the subordination of the unreasonable herd of society to the wise and the good is indebted to a long tradition of thought in terms of the body politic that goes back at least to Plato's *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*.<sup>60</sup>

To be sure, the reading experience of *Paradise Lost* in places appears to work against the arguments the text makes on a more discursive level: there

58 Burke E., "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly of France", in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 8 vols. (London, Thomas M'Lean: 1823) vol. 6, 1–68, 64. Cf. Gassenmeier M. – Gurr J.M., "Burke's Conservatism and its Echoes on the Continent and in the United States", in Sondrup S.P. – Nemoianu V. in collaboration with Gillespie G. (eds.), *Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders* (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: 2004) 117–139.

59 Burke E., *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event*, ed. C.C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth: 1986) 183.

60 For a discussion of the classical and medieval tradition behind such thought, cf. Gurr J.M., "From Plato to Chaucer, from Scripture to Fabliaux: Classical and Medieval Intertexts on Dualism and the Self", in Gurr J.M., *The Human Soul as Battleground: Variations on Dualism and the Self in English Literature* (Heidelberg: 2003) 21–43.

is surely an effect that might be called 'redemption through poetry', for instance as far as Eve is concerned, where the poetry goes against the grain of doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Discursively and as far as the dominant impression is concerned, however, *Paradise Lost*, it seems, develops an essentially pessimistic anthropology: Adam and Eve – and who are they but 'the people' in Eden – are unable responsibly to use their senses and to control the passions by means of reason. The consistent conflation of mental and political hierarchies then serves to establish a connection between a hierarchy of the senses and political systems, with republicanism requiring an ability to control the senses. If, as I think we must, we read *Paradise Lost* politically as a coded account of the failure of the English Revolution, then Milton's views on the failure of 'the people' during the English Revolution, their inability to handle liberty and subject their senses to the control of reason is staged in the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve and their inability to do the same.<sup>62</sup>

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61 For this contrast in the relationship of Adam and Eve, cf. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 128f., 376f.

62 This essay draws on my earlier attempt at coming to terms with the conflation of the inner faculties with political hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*; cf. Gurr, "Political and Mental Hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*".

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**PART 4**

*The Multisensual*





# The Multisensoriality of Place and the Chaucerian Multisensual

*Richard G. Newhauser*

## Introduction

Some years ago, the anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Stephen Feld pointed to a gap between the nature of human sensory perception and the way the sense of place has been investigated, especially in Western culture: ‘The overwhelmingly multisensory character of perceptual experience’, Feld notes, ‘should lead to some expectation for a multisensory conceptualization of place. But by and large, ethnographic and cultural geographic work on senses of place has been dominated by the visualism deeply rooted in the European concept of landscape.’<sup>1</sup> This focus on only one of the external senses is all the more surprising given that, as the physician and neurologist Oliver Sacks has written, ‘[t]here is increasing evidence from neuroscience for the extraordinarily rich interconnectedness and interactions of the sensory areas of the brain, and the difficulty, therefore, of saying that anything is purely visual, or purely auditory, or purely anything’.<sup>2</sup> Sensory modalities cannot be considered in isolation, but we hardly have a common language to speak of the multisensual or intersensorial or metamodal.

Had Feld and Sacks included literary history in their studies they would have found more evidence for the need to move beyond visuality by drawing on the representation of all of sensory experience, and especially the interaction of all five external senses, in the work of scholarship. This essay aims to foreground the construction of place in medieval texts and, in fact, the reliance on the multisensual in that enterprise. It focuses on the role of multisensoriality in conceptualizing place both in discursive works and, in particular, in Geoffrey Chaucer’s narrative texts. Chaucer is a convenient author to draw on because his works yield examples of the range of possibilities offered by the

1 Feld S., “Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Toward a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments”, in Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 179–191, 182.

2 Sacks O., “The Mind’s Eye. What the Blind See”, in Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 25–42, 33.



multisensoriality of place, from the homiletic invocation of torture in hell in "The Parson's Tale" to erotic pleasures in the temple of brass in *The Parliament of Fowls*. But Chaucer also drew on the multisensual for purposes unique to his own art, functions that have a bearing on his particular conception of narrative realism. These distinctive uses of the multimodal emerge when we follow Chaucer's construction of place in its full sensory expression.

Eric Palazzo, and before him Bob Scribner, have drawn attention to the multidimensional functions of the medieval liturgy and what Palazzo calls the 'activation' of all its sensory elements working together.<sup>3</sup> But in general the multisensual has been too little studied in the sensory research on literature in the Middle Ages as this has become a developing specialty in the burgeoning field of sensory studies in general in the past few years. This is typical of the relationship between medieval studies and sensory research altogether. One can say that because of both the alterity of the medieval texts that transmit sensory information and the distrust of sensory perception articulated in many theological treatises in the Middle Ages, medievalists (especially those not working in the area of visual studies) had much to overcome before joining in the work of sensology, something which has begun to happen in a concentrated way in the past several years. As defined by David Howes, one of the leading theoreticians of sensory studies, within the broad and rapidly increasing area of sensory history intersensoriality is 'the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies, whether considered in relation to a society, an individual, or a work'.<sup>4</sup> One can imagine the interconnection of the senses that make up common human experience using the image of a knot, but this does not mean that the interconnected sensations are to be conceived of as simultaneous, nor does intersensoriality have to mean

a synesthetic mingling of sensation. The strands of perception may be connected in many different ways. Sometimes the senses may seem to all be working together in harmony. Other times, sensations will be conflicted or confused. Either state may be employed as a social or aesthetic ideology.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Palazzo E., "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages", *Viator* 41 (2010) 25–56; Scribner B., "Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany", *The Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989) 448–469, 458.

4 Howes D., "Introduction: Empire of the Senses", in Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 1–17, 9.

5 Howes, "Introduction" 9.

The knot of multisensuality also does not demand an equality of the senses, which are typically ordered in hierarchies that also represent social rankings.<sup>6</sup>

### Multisensuality and Ethics

One more factor must be added to the interplay of the external senses in the conception of place in the Middle Ages, namely the degree to which sensory experience participated in the formation of ethics. There are comparatively few studies in contemporary sensology that take full account of the degree to which social and ideological conceptions of the senses are linked closely to ethical constructions, though a recent example may be found in the research by Kendall Eskine and others that discovered a link between gustatory experience and moral processing, in which sweet-tasting substances trigger favourable moral judgements about other people and, conversely, bitter or repulsive tastes elicit feelings of moral disgust.<sup>7</sup> But the interconnectedness of sensory experience and ethics is one of the areas where medievalists have much to offer contemporary sensory studies because the moral context for the senses is an essential element of the medieval understanding of the sensory world.<sup>8</sup> This much is well known, but what has been less studied is how and where the kinds of ideological purposes described by Howes frame the medieval sensorium in its ethical contours both in discursive texts and in its literary representation by authors like Chaucer and others. The goals of medieval pastoral theology, especially following Lateran IV (1215–1216), took in the sensorium as a way of expressing, and justifying, codes of behaviour that supported particular institutional structures: for example, the seven deadly sins were regularly distributed among the five external senses in manuals of confession as a way for priests to organize the questioning of penitents in the sacrament

6 Howes, "Introduction" 10.

7 Eskine K.J. – Kacinik N.A. – Prinz J.J., "A Bad Taste in the Mouth: Gustatory Disgust Influences Moral Judgment", *Psychological Science* 22, 3 (2011) 295–299. On taste in medieval theology, see Carruthers M., "Sweetness", *Speculum* 81 (2006) 999–1013; Fulton R., "'Taste and See That the Lord is Sweet' (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West", *Journal of Religion* 86 (2006) 169–204; Vecchio S., "Gusto, piacere, peccato nella cultura medievale", in *L'infinita varietà del gusto* (Padova: 2010) 27–39.

8 Newhauser R.G., "Introduction: The Sensual Middle Ages", in Newhauser R.G. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses, Volume 2: A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages* (London, etc.: 2014) 1–22, 8–12; Woolgar C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: 2006) 16–18. For the moral-exegetical understanding of the five senses see Adnès P., "Garde des sens", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 6 (1967) 117–122.

of penance and for penitents to systematize their own preparation for confession.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, counting off the senses became one of the standard catechetical pieces that memorialized a Christian's adherence to the institution of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Pastoral theology, in other words, was also in the business of not just controlling the senses, but of educating them. For example, Peter of Limoges' *Moral Treatise on the Eye*, a popularizing work on optics for preachers composed in Paris at the end of the thirteenth century, developed a chain of analogous reasoning relating scientific observations to moral interpretations that educates the viewer in a series of lessons on how to see, that is to say, on how to transform visual sensation into perception, or the science of vision into pastoral theology.<sup>11</sup>

But all of the senses could be considered suspicious as the portals for sin and a perception in need of theological pedagogy. The *Speculum vitae*, composed in Yorkshire in the third quarter of the fourteenth century and not a text that is overly focused on the senses, still conceives of its task of moral edification as amounting to lessons on: 'How yhe sal rewell here yhour lyf / And gouerne wele yhour wyttes fyue'.<sup>12</sup> What this amounts to is made more explicit in the discussion of the contrary virtue to wrath,<sup>13</sup> as it was in the *Somme le roi*, the *Speculum's* source text, as a lesson in the good management of the body:

Bot a man bihoues lede warly  
Pe fyue wyttes of his body

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- 9 Casagrande C., "Sistema dei sensi e classificazione dei peccati (secoli XII–XIII)", in *I cinque sensi / The Five Senses: Micrologus* 10 (2002) 33–54; Barratt A., "The Five Wits and Their Structural Significance in Part II of *Ancrene Wisse*", *Medium Aevum* 56 (1987) 12–24, 15–18.
  - 10 On the way memory images engage all the senses by triggering the senses in the memory, see Carruthers M., *The Book of Memory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge – New York: 2008) 78.
  - 11 Newhauser R., "Peter of Limoges, Optics, and the Science of the Senses", *The Senses & Society* 5 (2010) 28–44. Peter's text is available in an early printed edition, falsely attributed to John Pecham: *Johannis Pithsani archiepiscopi Canthuariensis ordinis fratrum minorum liber de oculo morali foeliciter incipit* (Augsburg: 1475 [?]). For an English translation based on this text, and corrected from the readings in thirteenth-century manuscripts, see Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*, trans. R. Newhauser (Toronto: 2012). On guarding the eyes, see Biernoff S., *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Houndmills – New York: 2002) 111–132.
  - 12 *Speculum vitae*, ed. R. Hanna, 2 vols., EETS OS 331–332 (Oxford: 2008) vol. 1, 6, vv. 55–56.
  - 13 For the concept of the contrary virtues, formerly known as 'remedial virtues', see Newhauser R., "Preaching the 'Contrary Virtues'", *Mediaeval Studies* 70 (2008) 135–162; reprint in Trudeau L.J. (ed.), *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (Detroit: 2014) vol. 159, 266–281.

Thurgh þe lyne of Equyte,  
 So þat na witte passe his degre,  
 And rewell þam so in þair offyce  
 So þat þai turne fra alle vyce:  
 Als þe eghen to se, þe eres to here,  
 Þe nese to smelle sauours sere,  
 Þe mouth to tast and to speke wele,  
 Þe handes and al þe body to fele.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the hierarchy represented here recapitulates a traditional ordering of the senses, so the inclusion of speech in the category of the sense of taste is also conventional. It demonstrates the way in which the senses are conceived in the Neoplatonist tradition in premodernity not as passive receptors, as we are likely to think of them, but as ‘media of communication’.<sup>15</sup> Stated in the idealized terms of the *Gawain*-Poet’s description of his eponymous knight, the goal of sensory education is to be found faultless in one’s five senses, though the limits of Gawain’s particular brand of perfection may be seen when, even as he is about to meet the Green Knight at the end of the romance, he is still placing blame for his predicament on anyone but himself. As he says: ‘Now I fele it is þe fende, in my fyue wyttez, / Þat hatz stoken me þis steuen to strye me here’.<sup>16</sup>

One of the passages in which Chaucer participates explicitly in the discursive tradition of the moral education of all the senses is found in “The Parson’s Tale”. He follows Augustine at one point in this penitential handbook by differentiating the sins according to their three loci of performance (i.e., in the heart, in the mouth, or in deed), but also by extending these three to the external senses, ‘that been sighte, herynge, smellynge, tastynge or savourynge, and feelynge’.<sup>17</sup> It is traditional in Western culture since Aristotle

14 *Speculum vitae*, vol. 1, 162, vv. 4801–4810. See Friar Laurent, *La Somme le roi*, ed. É. Brayer – A.-F. Leurquin-Labie (Paris – Abbeville: 2008) 265, 55.81–84.

15 Classen C., *Worlds of Sense* (London – New York: 1993) 2; on the Neoplatonist view of active perception, see Kärkkäinen P., “The Senses in Philosophy and Science”, in Newhauser R.G. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages* 111–132, 111–112.

16 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien – E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed., ed. N. Davis (Oxford: 1967) 60, vv. 2193–2194. The earlier reference to the five senses is v. 640 (p. 18). For an argument that the *Gawain*-Poet is referring to the five internal senses (i.e., the powers of the mind that process sensory perception) in his use of *wytte*z in the poem, see Whiteford P., “Rereading Gawain’s Five Wits”, *Medium Aevum* 73 (2004) 225–234.

17 Chaucer Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales* x.959. All citations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: 1987). The passage follows Augustine

that this list contains only five senses, and that it begins most frequently with vision and ends with touch.<sup>18</sup> Chaucer uses this hierarchy in “The Parson’s Tale” as a typical tool of admonition. Basing his work on Raymond of Penaforte early in “The Parson’s Tale”, Chaucer distinguishes six ways to move someone to contrition, the third of which is through fear of the pains of hell. While this outline of the material is derived from Raymond, the considerable expansion of the details in all the categories, especially the third one, appears to be Chaucer’s own work. The terror of what will be the sensory experience of sinners for an eternity in hell, he notes, should lead them to enter wholeheartedly into the penitential process:

But in helle hir sighte shal be ful of derknesse and of smoke, and therefore ful of teeres; and hir herynge ful of waymentynge and of gryntyng of teeth, as seith Jhesu Crist. Hir nose-thirles shullen be ful of stynkyng stynk; and, as seith Ysaye the prophete, ‘hir savoryng shal be ful of bitter galle’; and touchyng of al hir body ycovered with ‘fir that nevere shal quenche and with wormes that nevere shul dyen,’ as God seith by the mouth of Ysaye.<sup>19</sup>

The Parson evokes this image to point to the punishment of the senses as the fitting opposite of bodily pleasures that are derived from the ‘appetites of the fyve wittes’. Hell is conceived as the contrary extremity of earthly pleasure, the place where the linked senses are evoked because it is a site of timeless and terrifying intensity. Exactly that type of concentrated multisensuality became the typical mode to express the torments of hell in discursive texts. In the general inversion that hell was taken to depict, in which sinful actions on earth received reciprocal and perpetual punishments, the sensuous pleasures of sinners were fittingly thwarted for an infernal eternity.

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of Hippo, *Contra Faustum*, 22.27 (PL 42:418). On the stench of the devil and hell in the medieval imagination, see the contribution on “Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays” by Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler in this volume.

18 See Synnott A., “Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx”, in Howes D. (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience* (Toronto: 1991) 61–76, 63–65.

19 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* x.208–210.

### Multisensoriality in Sites of Communal Life

On earth, and expressive of the increased preoccupation with corporeality in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that Caroline Walker Bynum has drawn attention to,<sup>20</sup> the threat of multisensual temptation was often located in sites of communal life, closely defined places in which this enticement could be potentially disruptive to the moral ideal. Anselm of Canterbury's (d. 1109) analysis of the sin of curiosity gives a view of the Augustinian and monastic conception of this issue. *Curiositas* is presented in Anselm's *Liber de humanis moribus*, and in a slightly altered and enlarged form in *De similitudinibus*,<sup>21</sup> as part of the Augustinian triad of sins (pride, curiosity, and sins of the flesh), but a clear distinction is made between the perceptual and conceptual appearances of *curiositas*.<sup>22</sup> In the schematic approach represented here, these types of sinfully curious activity are classified according to how many basic elements they combine, the elements being the most discrete methods for indulging one's *curiositas*: in thoughts, words, deeds, or the various external senses. Thus, there are five simple types of sinful curiosity (in thought, word, deed, sight, or hearing), six double types (word and deed, word and sight, word and hearing, deed and sight, deed and hearing, or sight and hearing), and so on. Of these, twenty-eight types of the sin of curiosity are exclusively concerned with matters of sensory perception. The minuteness and practicality of this analysis for the monastic life is seen especially well here, for all of these types of *curiositas* are located in the marketplace or the dining hall. The sin of curiosity makes itself felt, in this way, when one is too eager to see what dishes are being served, or tries some of the food on the table only to know whether it tastes good or not, or smells spices for sale in the market simply to know what each one smells like. They reveal the fundamental monastic orientation of the author of the *Liber de humanis moribus*, for as examples of a faulty will and the results of one of the three major categories of sin, they assume an ascetic life far from these places of sensory temptation as their 'curiosity-free' diametric opposite.

20 Bynum C.W., *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: 1991) 183–186; Bynum C.W., *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley – London: 1987) 245–259, 252.

21 On the relationship of the two versions, see the introduction to the edition of the *Liber de humanis moribus*, in *Memorials of St. Anselm*, ed. R.W. Southern – F.S. Schmitt (London: 1969).

22 *Liber de humanis moribus* 47–50, paragraphs 26–36. The Augustinian triad is referred to explicitly in section 10 (p. 41). Augustine identified *curiositas* with the desire for sensory stimulation for its own sake; see Newhauser R., "Augustinian *Vitium curiositatis* and its Reception", reprint in Newhauser R., *Sin* (Aldershot, UK – Burlington, VT: 2007) essay XIV.

In a sense, Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) turns this on its head when he writes in a contemplative mode of a unified sensorium in which *caritas* is achieved by a process that mediates between the corporeal and the spiritual senses. In sermon 10 among the *Sermones de diversis*, he calls *caritas* the life of the sense(s).<sup>23</sup> The soul gives sense to the body, distributed in five bodily members; likewise, the soul gives a corresponding spiritual value to the senses distributed in five kinds of love: sight is related to the holy love (*amor sanctus*) of God; hearing to *dilectio* at a remove from the flesh; smell to the general love (*amor generalis*) of all human beings; taste to a pleasant or social love (*amor iucundus*, *amor socialis*) of one's companions; and touch to the pious love (*amor pius*) of parents for their young (both humans and animals).<sup>24</sup> And elsewhere, Bernard uses a rhetorical synesthesia to describe the unity of how the spiritual senses work: in his explication of the Song of Songs he writes that '[t]he bride has poured out an oil to whose odour the maidens are drawn to taste and feel how sweet is the Lord'.<sup>25</sup> But given a different object of love – namely sensory pleasure as a disruption in the heart of what should be the holiest of places, the monastery itself – Bernard was also alive to the threat of the senses, and when he wrote in a more practical vein he warned against the *curiosae depictiones* found painted on the cloister walls at Cluny which distracted the monks from their prayers. For Bernard, too, the ideals of the monastic life demanded a rejection of sensory *curiositas* in the key site of communal life, a relinquishing of 'all things glittering with beauty, agreeable in song, smelling delightfully, tasting sweetly, pleasing to the touch'.<sup>26</sup>

23 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones de diversis*, ed. J. Leclercq – H.M. Rochais, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, 8 vols. (Rome: 1957–1977) vol. 6/1, 121.

24 On the loves in Bernard's hierarchy, see Fulton, "Taste and See" 191.

25 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, ed. J. Leclercq – C.H. Talbot – H.M. Rochais, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 1, 112, 19.3.7. For 'rhetorical synaesthesia', see Rudy G., *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: 2002) 13–14, 54–55. On synaesthesia more generally: Classen C. – Howes D., *Ways of Sensing* (London – New York: 2014) 152–174. On the importance of touch among the spiritual senses, see Smith M.M., *Sensing the Past* (Berkeley: 2007) 97–99; Coolman B.T., *Knowing God by Experience* (Washington, DC: 2004) 151–152.

26 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*, ed. J. Leclercq – H.M. Rochais, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 3, 105, 12.28. See Newhauser R., "The Sin of Curiosity and the Cistercians", reprint in Newhauser, *Sin*, essay xv.



### Sensorial Dualism and the Edification of the Senses

The ethical construction of the senses in the monastery and the lay community exposes what has been described as a dualism or paradox in the Christian sensorium. As Joachim Küpper and Gabrielle Spiegel have observed in separate essays, in the Aristotelian tradition epistemology is based on sensory perception, in that the senses act as the first steps that will result in cognition and, moreover, sensory perception necessarily leads to desire.<sup>27</sup> As Aquinas put it, the Peripatetic dictum that '[t]here is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses' refers to human epistemology, not the divine intellect.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, as has been seen already, Christian metaphysics demands a denunciation of the senses as the portals of sin. Küpper finds here an impasse that cannot be perfected, arguing that if the means of perception are also the very agents undermining cognition, the connection of perception and the will can have no coherence.<sup>29</sup> Yet, one can observe that if the senses potentially destabilize cognition, the connection of perception and the will might still achieve coherence in a process of reforming the interpretation of sensory data, that is to say, precisely by the process of educating the senses that I have posited underlay works like "The Parson's Tale". The medieval paradox that Küpper points to, and the ambiguity of sensation itself, were in fact understood in the Middle Ages to demand an ethical response: these phenomena served as the foundation for the moral comprehension of the medieval sensorium, one in which the connection of the senses and volition is understood effectively as a pedagogical one.

This sensorial dualism or paradox is articulated in Chaucer's work in the different ways the senses are spoken of by two female characters as they attempt to instruct males: Philosophie in *Boece* and Prudence in the "Tale of Melibee". In the fifth book of the Boethian translation, Lady Philosophie explains faculty psychology to Boece, distinguishing the faculties, or internal senses, as derived

27 Aristotle, *De anima: Books II and III (with Passages from Book I)*, trans. D.W. Hamlyn (Oxford: 1993) 12–13, 2.2 (413b16–23). For Aristotle on the senses, see Jütte R., *A History of the Senses*, trans. J. Lynn (Cambridge – Malden, MA: 2005) 36–42.

28 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, in *Fratres Ordinis Praedicatorum* (ed.), *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Rome: 1970–1976) vol. 22/1–3, quaest. 2, art. 3, arg. 19 and ad 19, available at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/qdvo2.html> (accessed September 9, 2011).

29 Küpper J., "Perception, Cognition, and Volition in the *Arcipreste de Talavera*", in Nichols S.G. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore: 2008) 119–153; and in the same collection, Spiegel G.M., "Paradoxes of the Senses" 186–193.



ultimately from Aristotle's *De anima*.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in explicating how human perception differs from divine knowledge, she notes that a round shape is comprehended differently by different senses, and analogously a human being is comprehended differently by the senses, or imagination, or reason, or intelligence. These faculties work in stages of increasing abstraction culminating in the highest faculty, that of intelligence, which comprehends the pure form of a human being that remains eternally in divine thought. But the process begins with sensation by the senses (or their combination and judgement in the common sense),<sup>31</sup> that is to say, in the external comprehension of the shape of the body of a human being as this has material existence.<sup>32</sup> The senses function here as information gathering tools, perhaps limited in scope to the comprehension of material substance, but nevertheless necessary as the starting point for the further forms of understanding that eventually subsume them. Much different is the moral conception of the senses in Prudence's instruction of Melibee. In order to account for the justice of Melibee's suffering, Prudence appeals to two commonplaces: Melibee has too much wealth and has forgotten the creator of all wealth, or Melibee has sinned and is being punished for it now. In the latter category, she notes that Melibee has allowed the 'three enemies of man' (the world, the flesh, and the devil) to invade him through the five windows of his body, 'this is to seyn, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by thy fyve wittes'.<sup>33</sup> Though Melibee is not yet convinced by Prudence's allegorical rhetoric to foreswear revenge, it is clear that the senses function for Prudence as the portals of immorality for the uneducated male

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30 Studies of the internal senses include: Karnes M., *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: 2011) 31, 33; Steneck N.H., "Albert the Great on the Classification and Localization of the Internal Senses", *Isis* 65 (1974) 193–211; Harvey E.R., *The Inward Wits* (London: 1975).

31 Heller-Roazen D., "Common Sense: Greek, Arabic, Latin," in Nichols et al. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore: 2008) 30–50.

32 Chaucer, *Boece* v, Prosa 4.155.

33 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* VII.1424. As Chaucer counts them, Melibee's daughter has been wounded in her five sensory members: 'in hir feet, in hire handes, in hir erys, in hir nose, and in hire mouth' (VII.971–972). This represents the translation of the erroneous reading of the French original found in one manuscript, *piez* (feet), for *yeux* (eyes) in the other witnesses. Akbari S.C., *Seeing through the Veil* (Toronto: 2004) 218, has interestingly interpreted this as a reference to the absence of one of Sophie's senses, her eyes. On the world, the flesh, and the devil, see Wenzel S., "The Three Enemies of Man", *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967) 47–66; reprint in Wenzel S., *Elucidations* (Louvain: 2010) 17–38.

will that develops into the focus of the narrative.<sup>34</sup> The tale itself becomes not just an education in and by political prudence, but also edification in the control of sensation by means of a humility that seeks the assistance of God.<sup>35</sup>

Chaucer further deploys the ethical possibilities of the interaction of the senses as a validation of sanctity in both discursive and mimetic contexts. Susan Harvey has called particular attention to the way in which olfaction aids in the construction of holiness, and indeed the odour of sanctity is ubiquitous in saint's lives.<sup>36</sup> But more than the sense of smell is involved in holiness; sanctity can also come with a sweet sound.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it can be accompanied by a particular type of vision, as happens in "The Second Nun's Tale", where sight and smell work together in the context of early-Christian Rome to support conversion and its alignment with aristocratic status.<sup>38</sup> Control of the senses not only develops a spiritual sight, but also a spiritual olfaction. Valerian is convinced instantaneously of the truth of Christianity by the sight of an angel; his brother Tiburce smells the crowns of roses and lilies that the angel has given Cecilia and Valerian, and Tiburce is immediately transformed. As he says: "The sweete smel that in myn herte I fynde / Hath chaunged me al in another kynde".<sup>39</sup> The other narrative besides "The Second Nun's Tale" in Fragment VIII, "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale", demonstrates the failure of elements to be converted into gold in the context of urban space in fourteenth-century England in an environment of malodorous fumes, the entire alchemical process meant only to deceive the sight of the uneducated. This is not a statement of philosophical skepticism in the face of the relativity of perception as has been argued

34 See Wallace D., *Chaucerian Polity* (Stanford: 1997) 231. On the metaphor of the senses as windows see Jer 9:21.

35 See Strohm P., "The Allegory of the *Tale of Melibee*", *The Chaucer Review* 2 (1967) 32–42.

36 Harvey S.A., *Scenting Salvation* (Berkeley: 2006); Classen C. – Howes D. – Synnott A., *Aroma* (London – New York: 1994) 52–54; Genders R., *A History of Scent* (London: 1972) 9–10. For the function of odour in the sanctity of the Church, see Gauthier C., "L'odeur et la lumière des dédicaces: L'encens et le luminaire dans le rituel de la dédicace de l'église au haut Moyen Age", in Méhu D. (ed.), *Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration de l'église dans l'Occident médiéval* (Turnhout: 2007) 75–90. See further Critten – Kern-Stähler, "Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays" in this volume.

37 Saucier C., "The Sweet Sound of Sanctity: Sensing Saint Lambert", *The Senses & Society* 5, 1 (2010) 10–27.

38 For Cecilia's perfected vision, see Collette C.P., "A Closer Look at Sainte Cecile's Special Vision", *Chaucer Review* 10 (1976) 337–349. On the importance of sight as a sensory marker for sanctity, see Hahn C., "Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early-Medieval Saints' Shrines", *Speculum* 72 (1997) 1079–1106.

39 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* VIII.251–252.

for late medieval and early modern philosophy; rather, it highlights the fragility of sensory information, for by itself uneducated seeing is not believing – or at least it ought not to be.<sup>40</sup> And on the other hand, Chaucer clearly knows, though he also expresses it tongue-in-cheek, that demanding certitude in perception is an impossibility on earth that will put him out of business as an author of books if it is taken too seriously. As he says in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as a way of justifying the particular truth of poetry:

Men shal nat wenen every thing a lye  
But yf himself yt seeth or elles dooth;  
For, god wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,  
Thogh every wight ne may hit nat ysee.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, fiction is an enterprise that demands from its readers something like sensory trust in the narrator, though of course this claim is creatively problematized, in particular for the authenticity of the narrator, in dream visions.<sup>42</sup> In the story of Cecilia, and in line with the faculty psychology of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, sensation is the first step in a process of true transformation.

If holiness smells sweetly in Cecilia's tale, one can observe elsewhere that the relationship of the senses to transformation is also validated by the opposite kind of smell: In "The Parson's Tale", as noted already, the sinful will have their olfactory sense assaulted by foul odors in hell; and in "The Summoner's Tale" the fart Thomas delivers into the hand of the friar is of sufficient stench that the lord of the village can only imagine the devil put this behaviour into Thomas' mind. The sensory regimes of the tales of the Summoner and the Second Nun also underscore the social alignments of the senses and the ethical valences that attach to the estates: the aristocratic Cecilia, described as 'of noble kynde,' smells like a representative of her class, whereas Thomas' thunderous fart turns him instantaneously from a 'goode man' with a substantial household into a loudly destructive ('noyous') and malodorous churl.<sup>43</sup>

40 See Clark S., *Vanities of the Eye* (Oxford: 2007); Denery D.G., II, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World* (Cambridge: 2005); cf. Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham, UK – Burlington, VT: 2011) 17.

41 Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women* Prol. [F] 12–15.

42 Cartlidge N., "Narrative and Gossip in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*", in Bayer G. – Klitgård E. (eds.), *Narrative Developments from Chaucer to Defoe* (New York – London: 2011) 221–234, 221.

43 Allen V.J., "Broken Air", *Exemplaria* 16 (2004) 305–322.

Chaucer here anticipates a constitutive component of modernity in making class distinctions – and their volatility – indebted to olfaction, in making the sense of smell a tool to enact social differences.<sup>44</sup>

### Narrating Multisensorial Place: *The Parliament of Fowls*

Though the visual and the olfactory work together in the tales just mentioned (with the addition of the sense of touch in the friar's groping hand in "The Summoner's Tale"), all five senses are not shown interacting as was seen in the multisensoriality that defined hell in "The Parson's Tale". Chaucer is able to construct a narrative indicative of the emergence of only one sense, as he does in his auditory book, the *House of Fame*, where the cloying visual appearances of the Temple of Glass give way to representations of sound.<sup>45</sup> One can make this assertion without subscribing to a master-narrative of historiography, the theory of the 'Great Divide,' according to which vision dominates modernity whereas the medieval period is the 'age of the ear,' as even such a great medievalist as Lucien Febvre characterized it.<sup>46</sup> The sense of sight may have risen in importance in modernity, but this need not imply its relative unimportance in the pre-modern period nor should the modern importance of sight 'blind us to the continued cultural activity of the non-visual senses'.<sup>47</sup> But the multisensual that involves all, or nearly all, the senses is relatively rare as a sustained and continuous presence in a mimetic context of any age, not just in Chaucer's works. Nor should this be surprising. Perceptual experience may be overwhelmingly multisensory, but it does not impinge on our consciousness in a continual multisensory thunderstorm, nor can its imitation afford to be multisensual for long stretches of text. From the moment we open our eyes in the morning, our consciousness is framed by the sensations that come to us from all our senses. Some, however, are more prominent than others, and

44 On the use of olfaction in early English drama, see Dugan H., "Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England", *Journal of Medieval & Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008) 229–252. On the 'stench of the poor', see Corbin A., *The Foul and the Fragrant*, trans. M. Kochan – R. Porter – C. Prendergast (Leamington Spa: 1986) 142–160.

45 For a sensory reading of the tale, see Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil* 203–210. On the background of the tale, see Grennen J.E., "Chaucer and Chalcidius: The Platonic Origins of the *House of Fame*", *Viator* 15 (1984) 237–262.

46 Smith, *Sensing the Past* 10–15; Febvre L., *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. B. Gottlieb (Cambridge, MA: 1982) 428–432, 436–437.

47 Howes, "Introduction" 12.

in the normal course of events our perceptual experience takes into account this important information provided on a constant and ever-changing basis by our senses while barely registering minute changes of temperature, the low noises in the background, and so on. Our conscious attention provides a filter for perception so that we do not become hopelessly bogged down in an infinitesimal detailing of the sensations we are aware of only subliminally that make up the totality of our perceptual experience.<sup>48</sup> To be otherwise, to be unable to sift out what become overwhelming sensations of sound and smell and touch is to be autistic, as Oliver Sacks observes when speaking of Temple Grandin.<sup>49</sup> The literary filter that corresponds to our non-autistic ability to control sensory input defines the expectations of mimesis. This filter applies to the narration of sensations impinging on a character's mind, and it is also part of the validation of sensory trust in reading mimetic fiction.<sup>50</sup> Erich Auerbach often characterized the 'serious realism' he found typical of mimesis in medieval literature as one having sensory power, by which he meant that it was able 'to represent the most everyday phenomena of reality,' but the multisensory allows us to observe those unfiltered moments that go beyond quotidian mimesis.<sup>51</sup> It is no wonder that passages of multisensoriality occur in mimetic narratives only within controlled boundaries.

In Chaucer's work, such passages can be found, but importantly not in the description of the epicurean Franklin's fixation on gustatory pleasures in the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>52</sup> They occur rather in *The Parliament of Fowls*, in the first instance when Scipio brings the narrator into the garden. To fall back on a typical Western reliance on visuality as the chief or singular sense perception used in understanding the *Parliament* would be to miss the implications of Chaucer's appeal to all the senses. In its initial phase, this homage to Boccaccio emphasizes only one of the inscriptions over the gate, namely the one which identifies it as 'that blyful place';<sup>53</sup> allegorically, as Derek Pearsall has observed, the garden represents 'the first experience of being in love'.<sup>54</sup> And love, as has been indicated already, is an expected

48 See the discussion of the cultural-historical implications of this feature of consciousness in Howes D., "Can These Dry Bones Live? An Anthropological Approach to the History of the Senses", *The Journal of American History* 95 (2008) 442–451.

49 Sacks O., "Foreword", in Grandin T., *Thinking in Pictures* (New York: 1995; reprint, 2006) xiv.

50 The relationship between this kind of narration and 'psycho-narration' is mentioned in Cohn D., *Transparent Minds* (Princeton: 1978) 49–50.

51 Auerbach E., *Mimesis*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton: 1953) 555.

52 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* 1.331–354.

53 Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls* 127.

54 Pearsall D., *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford – Cambridge, MA: 1992) 124.

thematic context in which to find the multisensual.<sup>55</sup> All of the complications of romantic love are still to come in the poem, but at first the garden shares general characteristics with other medieval descriptions of landscapes in being intimately foregrounded in detail, not somewhere far off in the distance,<sup>56</sup> and it shares more specific characteristics with portrayals of the *locus amoenus*: the trees are verdant, the sounds of birds and musical instruments fill the air,<sup>57</sup> the temperature is perfect, the smell of the meadow sweet, and we can almost taste ‘the olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne’.<sup>58</sup> As an ideal garden, this walled enclosure of multisensorial innocence is also far distant from the spatial aesthetic of an eighteenth-century park where pleasure consists in the visual enjoyment of the eye roaming across a wide panorama.<sup>59</sup> The senses are saturated in this site of endless pleasures in which time has stopped in a mythic and eternal spring, but by contrast, as Michel Zink has observed about other depictions of the *locus amoenus*, humanity is also reminded of being subject to the laws of nature, which means the potential of change on the one hand and generation (love) on the other.<sup>60</sup> As a timeless location of earthly pleasure, at least before the sorrows of love are introduced, the garden is a type of heaven on earth, promising the precise contrary in the ethics of the senses to the sensory torture in hell in “The Parson’s Tale”.

As the next instance of multisensoriality, all of the pleasures of the garden are then eroticized in the temple of brass. In the surroundings of this parallel, in the realm of experience, to the innocent pleasures of the garden, Chaucer registers not a perfect temperature, but the heat of desire and the flame of passionate jealousy; not the sweet smell of the meadow, but the cloying scents of erotic love; not just the fruit of the vine, but the intoxicating presence of the god of wine himself. In a play on the top-to-toe rhetorical *descriptio* of female beauty, our sight is focused on Venus and her loosened hair, then her exposed breasts, then the flimsy cloth covering the rest of her body as she lies on a bed of gold, ‘in disport’.<sup>61</sup> This too, then, is a heaven of sorts, but one of eroticized myth, something that is emphasized not only by the presence of gods

55 See also Nordenfalk C., “The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985) 1–22 (8).

56 Lewis C.S., *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: 1964; reprint 1970) 101.

57 As noted by Fritz J.-M., *La cloche et la lyre* (Geneva: 2011) chapt. 4, the songs of birds are typical of the soundscape of the medieval *locus amoenus*.

58 Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls* 181.

59 See Classen C., *The Deepest Sense* (Champaign, IL: 2012) 157.

60 Zink M., “The Place of the Senses”, in Nichols et al. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore: 2008) 93–101.

61 Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls* 260.

and goddesses, but also by the appearance of allegorical characters like Dames Peace and Patience outside the temple, and Wealth, Venus' partner in bed, within. Its otherworldly nature is all the more apparent in the contrast between the eternity of passion that it represents and the figures of disastrous love painted on the walls. These legendary or fictional characters paid the price of violence or moral disapprobation for their erotic sensations that led only to rape (Calyxte), sacrilege (Athalanta), carnal sin (Semyramis), physical suffering (Hercules), insanity (Biblis), suicide (Dido, Cleopatra), adultery (Tristram, Isaude), and more.

The multisensual demands of love, whether in innocence or as eroticized experience, belong to a fabulous eternity that the narrator must pass by on his way to the gritty and often humorous negotiations of avian marriage, the political echoes of the birds' parliament in all its everyday detail in a narration that now avoids the multisensual to depend on vision and hearing alone.<sup>62</sup> In this transition, the narrator also enters a decisively time-bound environment, unlike the garden or the temple, which is marked by calendrical measurements (Saint Valentine's Day) as well as the insistence by the birds of the lower orders that the time for choosing a mate should end soon. The narrator's emergence from the garden and temple into the temporal world of the parliament is not without parallel in Chaucer's oeuvre. As Winthrop Wetherbee has noted, "The Knight's Tale" comes to terms with epic in its narrator's confrontations with his own world and the unresolved facets of his emotional life: in the Temple of Diana he discovers his anxiety regarding the feminine will, at Arcite's funeral he realizes the emotions of horror at violence and compassion for its victims that chivalry cannot fully account for.<sup>63</sup> The everyday world of the Knight that governs his reality emerges there in the same way as the transition into the political and temporal world of the sounds and sights of love's negotiations leaves behind the mythic states of multisensoriality in *The Parliament of Fowls* and focuses the narration instead on the here and now, from the details of class distinction to the problems of choice crystallized in the formel's will.<sup>64</sup> The

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62 That this narrator was Chaucer, reciting the poem, is argued most recently by Quinn W.A., "Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and His Pre-Text of Narration", in Bayer – Klitgård (eds.), *Narrative Developments* 79–96.

63 Wetherbee W., "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *Exemplaria* 2 (1990) 303–328.

64 On the *Parliament* as an examination of the will, see Lynch K., *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge: 2000) 83–109; Spearing A.C., *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: 1976) 100.



*Parliament's* turn from the multisensual to the sensory limitations of mimesis is one more of Chaucer's steps in the development of a realistic fiction.

As has been seen, the intersensoriality of all five external senses could serve many purposes in the description of place. Discursively, it could function as a way to heighten impending danger: for Anselm of Canterbury, the multisensual characterized the potential threat posed by the marketplace and the dining hall, Bernard of Clairvaux warned of the vitiating effect of multisensoriality among the Cluniacs. Chaucer availed himself of this monitory function, but both in discursive and narrative contexts the multisensoriality of place articulated for him an intensity of sensation that reached beyond normal, time-bound experience. It lay not in the realm of the human, the realm of mimetic (and filtered) verisimilitude that lies between heaven and hell, but in the very extremes of heaven and hell themselves. Chaucer's bracketing of the quotidian by spheres of timeless and multisensual intensity lets us see something of his construction of the everyday, of not only its enigmatic features, but of its inchoateness.<sup>65</sup> His narrative settings that are so much in evidence in many of *The Canterbury Tales* have the quality of a local landscape in their uniqueness and detail, not the mingled place of a transcendental nature, as Michel Serres has termed it in his meditations on the five senses.<sup>66</sup> Like the poetics of metaphor, the sensory takes on for Chaucer a foundational quality, that is, it becomes a 'category within which we construct reality, poetry, and ourselves'.<sup>67</sup> In this way, the fragmentary interaction of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches of Chaucer's mimetic narratives articulates the conception of a temporal and imperfect world, one unfulfilled (and unable to be fulfilled) in his writings by a moral clarity and multisensorial completion that was to be found for all eternity only in the mythic intensity of the end of life.

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65 Cf. Sheringham M., "Language, Color, and the Enigma of Everydayness", in Syrotinski M. – Maclachlan I. (eds.), *Sensual Reading* (Lewisburg – London: 2001) 127–152, 129.

66 Serres M., *The Five Senses*, trans. M. Sankey – P. Cowley (London – New York: 2008) 307–310.

67 Travis P.W., *Disseminal Chaucer* (Notre Dame, IN: 2010) 199.



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# ‘Eate Not, Taste Not, Touch Not’. The Five Senses in John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*

Kathrin Scheuchzer

## Introduction

John Foxe’s Protestant martyrology *Actes and Monuments* (1563–1583), also known as *Book of Martyrs*, is one of the largest works printed in sixteenth-century England and presents the Protestant Church as the true Church of Christ whereas the Roman Catholic Church is described as the Church of Antichrist. It first appeared in English shortly after the Marian persecution of Protestants in the mid-sixteenth century and is dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I, whom Foxe hails as a second Constantine and saviour of the true Church. Foxe’s anti-Catholic sentiments are foregrounded in a number of polemical attacks on Catholic monasticism, which are invariably formulated in terms of hypocrisy and false asceticism. The following passage is exemplary of this, presenting the monastic orders as based on false principles of abstinence and renunciation of the senses:

As true pietie, & sincere preachyng of Christes worde began [...] to decay: So idle monkery and vaine superstitiō in place therof begā to increase. For about þ<sup>e</sup> same yere [1414] þ<sup>e</sup> king [Henry v] began þ<sup>e</sup> foundatiō of ij. Monasteries [...]. The order of these was accordyng to the description of S. Paul the Apostle Collos. 1. Eate not, taste not, touch not. &c.<sup>1</sup>

By referencing Colossians 2:21, Foxe presents Catholic asceticism as something that *appears* pious and wise, but ultimately serves as a cover for self-indulgence. In Foxe’s view, this takes the form of adultery, personal advancement through simony and the gain of worldly goods.<sup>2</sup> It becomes clear that Foxe sees the overly ascetic principle of ‘eate not, taste not, touch not’ critically and the question arises as to what proper use of the senses might entail.

1 Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the *Actes and Monuments* are taken from the 1570 edition in Foxe John, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO*, 2nd ed. (London, John Daye: 1570; Sheffield: 2011); here at 721.

2 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 838 (1576 edition).

Until very recently, the significance of the five senses in the religion and literature of Reformation and post-Reformation England was largely understudied. In the last decade or so, studies like Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler's edited volume on *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* and Matthew Milner's seminal book on *The Senses and the English Reformation* have emphasised and highlighted the fact that scholars' neglect of sensory experience and what it can tell us about sixteenth-century religiosity has led to an oversimplification of the intricacies of late medieval and early modern piety. Contrary to the widely held view of Protestantism as 'austere' and overly intellectual, Milner argues that the sixteenth century did not see an overthrow of traditional conceptions of the senses, but that sensory experience was central to the Reformation discourse.<sup>3</sup> The iconoclastic mindset of sixteenth-century Protestants, Milner points out, was based on 'the same belief that gave shape to traditional sacramentality – the notion that sensation did something physical and real to the perceiver'.<sup>4</sup> Milner's study thus echoes and participates in a wider discourse about the validity of Max Weber's secularisation theory or the 'disenchantment of the world' supposedly brought about by the Reformation movements.<sup>5</sup> A number of scholars, most notably Alexandra Walsham, have recently argued against this theory, emphasising that there were a range of continuities between the medieval and early modern periods rather than radical changes that can be attributed to the Reformation as a single driving force.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Eamon Duffy has shown that many elements of late medieval piety endured in England well into the sixteenth century: 'the vigour, richness, and creativity of late medieval religion was undiminished, and continued to hold the imagination and elicit the loyalty of the majority of the population'.<sup>7</sup> As Duffy points out, it was only towards the end of the century that '[t]he imaginative world of the *Golden Legend* and the *Festial* was gradually obliterated'.<sup>8</sup> Reformers and polemicists like Foxe had all grown up in a time in which Catholicism still dominated religious life in England.

Accordingly, Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* exhibits a number of continuities between late medieval Catholic religiosity and sixteenth-century

3 Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham – Burlington: 2011) 4.

4 Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* 4.

5 See Weber M., *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London – New York: 2005 [1930]); see also Thomas K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: 1971).

6 Walsham A., "The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed", *The Historical Journal* 51, 2 (2008) 497–528. See also Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* 6ff.

7 Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven – London: 1992) 479.

8 Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* 593.

Protestantism. Although, no doubt, exemplary of the polemical and iconoclastic mindset of early Protestant religion, Foxe's book also bears traces of, and does not completely break with, earlier, medieval piety and tradition. Foxe's use of the senses and sensory metaphors is especially instructive in this respect, but has, so far, not attracted much critical attention. Scholars like David Loades, John N. King, Thomas Freeman and Elizabeth Evenden have done invaluable work on Foxe's book in relation to sixteenth-century historiography, book production and theology and have rightly emphasised the importance of the *Actes and Monuments* as the most substantial source of information on post-Reformation England.<sup>9</sup> The present paper aims to contribute to our understanding of Foxe's work by examining the status and function of sense perception in his martyrology and exploring the author's use of sensory metaphors as a way of substantiating his Protestant propagation of the Scriptures as the sole source of salvation and primary object of sense experience. As will be shown, the Word of God can be taken in through all five senses; it can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled and touched.

### Vision and Hearing

Reflecting the precedence already given to *visus* and *auditus* in the classical and medieval hierarchies of the senses, vision and hearing are by far the two senses that are most frequently alluded to in the *Actes and Monuments*. Scholars like Arnold Hunt and Jennifer Rae McDermott have argued that the reformers and early Protestants shifted the traditional focus from seeing to hearing, giving precedence to biblical exegesis in the sermon.<sup>10</sup> As is well known, this has to do with the reformers' return *ad fontes* and their adherence to the Lutheran *sola scriptura*<sup>11</sup> principle. Like many sixteenth-century writers, Foxe also propagates

9 See Loades D. (ed.), *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot – Brookfield: 1997); King J.N., *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: 2006); Freeman T. – Evenden E., *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"* (Cambridge: 2011).

10 Hunt A., *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: 2010); McDermott J., "The Melodie of Heaven': Sermonizing the Open Ear in Early Modern England", in Boer W. de – Göttler Ch. (eds.), *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: 2013) 177–197.

11 For Martin Luther's formulation of the *sola scriptura* principle see his *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis x. novissimam damnatorum*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, Weimarer Ausgabe (Graz: 1966).

the notion that the invention of the printing press<sup>12</sup> was a God-sent gift to the Protestant cause and he praises his martyrs' profound biblical knowledge, focusing on the Bible as the sole source of salvation. As has been shown, the importance the reformers placed on the sermon (Henry Bullinger is thought to have preached no less than 7000 sermons in his lifetime)<sup>13</sup> undoubtedly helped put aurality on a par with seeing. While Hunt argues that hearing eventually came to replace vision as the highest of senses in Protestantism, I argue that Foxe's martyrology does not embrace this change and indicates that hearing was not necessarily privileged by all Protestant writers.

On the contrary, Walter Ong has suggested that the rise of the printing press in fact paved the way for the modern superiority of the eye over the ear and Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* makes a similar claim.<sup>14</sup> In a short chapter entitled 'The benefite and inuention of Printyng', Foxe proclaims: 'Both the pope, and all his colledge of Cardinals, must this vnderstand, that through the lyght of printyng, the world beginneth now to haue eyes to see, and heades to iudge'.<sup>15</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, this passage suggests that the 'light of knowledge' is mediated through the reading eye rather than through hearing.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, a number of sensory metaphors in Foxe's martyrology pertain to the power of sight or lack thereof. For example, attacking Catholic practices like pilgrimage or the selling of indulgences, Foxe concludes that '[i]n these so *blinde* & miserable corrupt dayes of darkenes and ignoraunce [i.e. the 400 years before the Reformation], thou *seest*, good reader [...] how necessarie it was, & hygh tyme, that reformation of þ<sup>e</sup> Church should come'.<sup>17</sup> It is significant that Foxe more often associates corruption, idolatry and heresy with blindness than deafness, even though both metaphors were common enough in the sensory language of previous centuries. Rather than privileging hearing over sight, then, the *Actes and Monuments* participates in an Aristotelian tradition in which sight is thought of as the highest of senses.

Foxe's title page illustration [Fig. 10.1], which remained unchanged in all four of his sixteenth-century editions, further supports this argument. It suggests

12 For a detailed discussion of the cultural shift from orality to literacy see Shell A., *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2007).

13 Pettegree A., *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: 2005) 11.

14 See Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 121; Ong W.J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London – New York: 1982). See also Smith M.M., *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Los Angeles: 2007) 8–13.

15 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 858.

16 Reist K., "Writing the Relic, Fetishising the Written: John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*", *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 12, 2–3 (2010) 292.

17 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1006; emphases added.



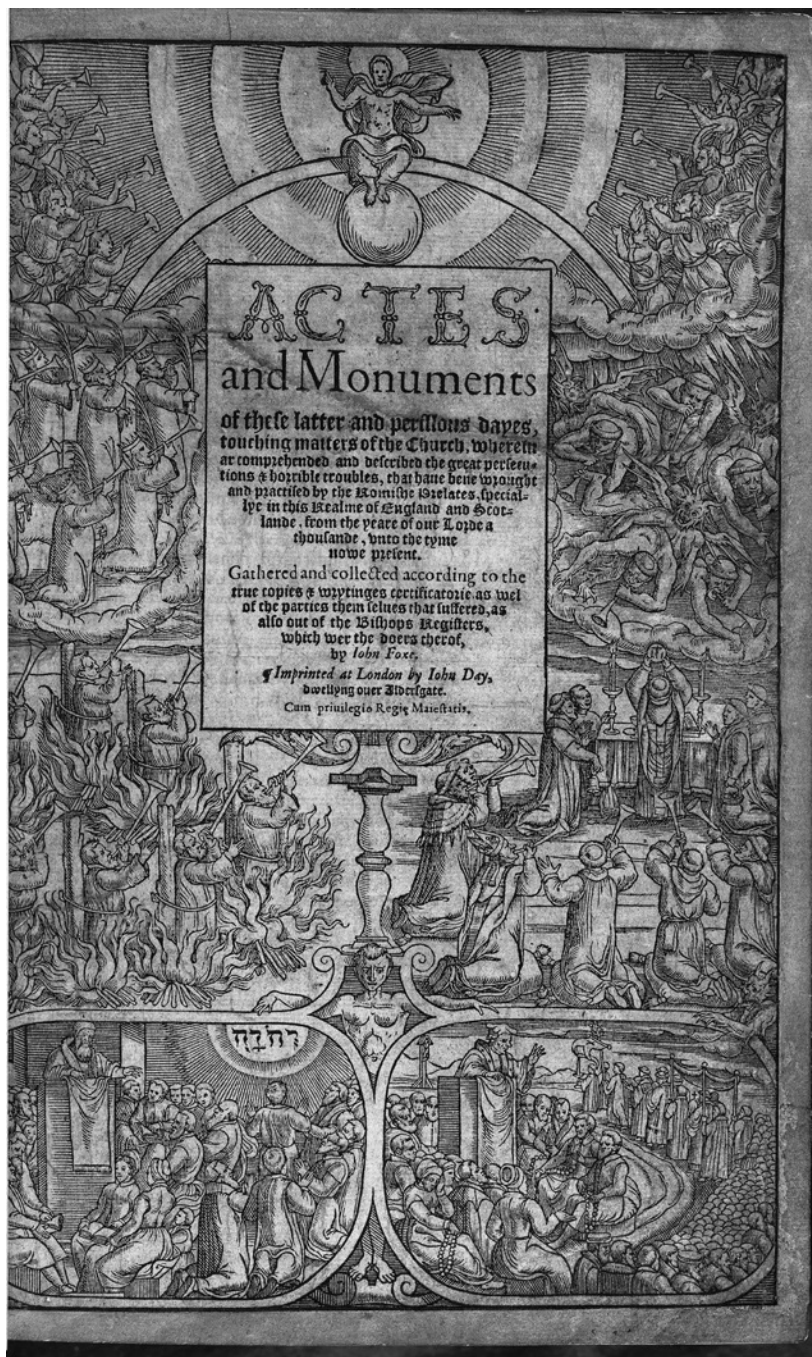


FIGURE 10.1 *John Foxe, title page of the Actes and Monuments (London, John Day: 1563). British Library, London, General Reference Collection G. 12101.*  
IMAGE © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD



that the Word of God can not only be touched in its material manifestation as written text and heard through the priest's expounding of it in the sermon but that it can also be perceived visually. The bottom left frame presents the Protestant congregation both as concentrated listeners and as readers and as worshippers of the visual appearance of the Word of God in the form of the Tetragrammaton. It should be pointed out that the same three senses, touch, hearing and vision, are also foregrounded in Foxe's depiction of the Catholic service on the right. The congregation is shown as listening to a sermon (hearing), telling their beads (touch) and as watching a Corpus Christi procession (seeing). At the same time, however, the elevated Host in the Corpus Christi procession also points to the Catholic focus on physical sense experience involving the lower senses of smell and taste. These lower senses, it will be shown, are no less central in Foxe's Protestant ideology, but they are elevated in that they are used in *spiritual*, not physical, sense perception. It follows that the difference made between the two scenes on Foxe's title page is not the believers' use of the senses *per se*, but the *object* of sense perception. More precisely, the Protestant sensory experience is shown as pertaining to the Word of God in all its manifestations, whereas Catholic sensation is depicted as centring on the material elements of religion, as is evident in the rosaries and, more importantly, the real presence of *corpus Christi* in the consecrated Host. I argue, therefore, that the question is not so much which senses are privileged within the two opposing Churches, but to what end the use of sense perception is licensed and encouraged. Clearly, it is not visual sense experience itself but what is being seen that makes all the difference in Foxe's book. As is evident in the bottom panel of his title page, Foxe, in true Protestant spirit, gives precedence to God's presence in the Scriptures rather than in the Eucharist.

The bible as book calls for a joint audio-visual experience, in which its subject matter is meant to come to life. As Erasmus wrote in the *Paraclesis* to his bilingual edition of the New Testament, the Scriptures 'render [Christ] so fully present that you would *see* less if you *gazed* upon Him with your very eyes'.<sup>18</sup> Erasmus thus posits that the Gospel not only reflects the essence of Christ, but that it presents the reader with a 'speaking, healing, dying [and] rising' Christ, Christ as a living person.<sup>19</sup> It follows that Scripture, i.e. Christ made Word,

18 Erasmus Desiderius, *Paraclesis*, in Olin J.C. (ed.), *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (New York: 1987) 97–108, 108; emphases added.

19 Erasmus, *Paraclesis* 108; cf. Kearney J., *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: 2009) 56. See also Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* 266 and Palmer Wandel L., *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: 2006) 4–5.

is equal, if not superior to Christ made flesh in the form of the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the numerous woodcuts Foxe incorporated in his martyrology not only illustrate the written text they accompany but also serve to make the events described come to life. The short caption preceding a depiction of the figure of Justice underlines this: 'A *liuely* picture describing the weight and substance of Gods most blessed word'.<sup>21</sup> It follows that both text and image are meant to virtually come alive in the reader's mind through visual perception. Significantly, Erasmus's vocabulary only refers to vision, not hearing. The living Christ perceptible through the Bible, then, can primarily be seen.

Similarly, in his introduction to Nicholas Ridley's martyrdom, Foxe asks the reader 'with care & study wel to peruse, diligently to consider, and depely to *print* the same [i.e. Ridley's story] in thy brest'.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the visual perception of Foxe's written text is thought to leave an almost physical impression on the reader. Foxe's choice of words here is certainly no coincidence and reminds us, on the one hand, of his propagation of the printing press as a gift from God, hence the term 'imprint', and, on the other, of the Aristotelian theory of sense perception.

Aristotle's treatise *De Anima* describes what is known as the intromission theory, according to which the 'species' emitted from an object are transported to the sense organs through a medium such as air or water. These species leave a physical impression almost like a seal or stamp and thus transform the sense organs and, by extension, the sensible spirit, which then transports this sense data to the brain.<sup>23</sup> As Milner has shown in numerous examples, this Aristotelian theory was widespread in early modern England and there

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20 This superiority of the written word is further underlined in Erasmus's call to his fellow Christians to revere the Gospel in the same way as one also covets 'the letters written by a dear friend, [which] we kiss [...] fondly, we carry them about, we read them again and again' (*Paraclesis* 105). In drawing this comparison, Erasmus points to a phenomenon that Laura Kendrick has termed a 'belief that something of the person is preserved in the trace of his or her handwriting' (*Animating the Letter* [Columbus: 1999] 12). According to Erasmus, the same holds true for the New Testament, which quite literally preserves Christ's holy mind and must, therefore, be read by all Christians and needs to be made accessible to everyone.

21 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 795 (1576 edition); emphasis added.

22 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1934; emphasis added.

23 Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, 2 vols., Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: 1984) vol. 2, 12; see also Aquinas Thomas, *A Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, trans. R. Pasnau (New Haven – London: 1999) 282–283, 343–344; and Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* 24. Also see Stump E., *Aquinas* (London – New York: 2003) 248ff.

is no doubt that Foxe, educated at the University of Oxford (graduating in 1537 and 1543), was familiar with it. There are several passages in the *Actes and Monuments* in which the senses are, in Aristotelian spirit, subdivided into five outward and five inward senses, a concept with which even uneducated women are said to have been familiar. According to Foxe, Joan Collins, of whom we know nothing else, 'was noted, for that she had learned with her father and mother, the tenne Commaundementes, the vij. deadly sinnes, the vij. works of mercy, the v. wittes bodily and ghostlye, the viij. blessings, and v. chapters of S. Iames Epistle'.<sup>24</sup> Knowledge of the five senses, both 'bodily' (exterior) and 'ghostlye' (interior) thus seems to have been as widespread as knowledge of the Decalogue or the seven vices and virtues. Indeed, Duffy's discussion of fifteenth-century devotional collections shows that Joan's reading was not uncommon and that the elements Foxe lists were often grouped together for didactic purposes.<sup>25</sup>

While the Aristotelian interior senses alluded to in the passage above refer to cognitive faculties, such as phantasy or imagination, Christian religious writing perpetuated the idea of spiritual inner senses. This gained particular relevance in the on-going debate about whether or not Christ was really and truly present in the transubstantiated Host. Reformers and Protestant zealots like Foxe maintained that the presence was symbolic rather than physical.<sup>26</sup> The debate about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was not new, but it divided sixteenth-century believers like no other doctrinal disagreement and was directly related to the question of what was perceptible by the inner and outward senses respectively. It was a question of how, if at all, Christ incarnate, i.e. Christ as body, could be experienced, be it through reading of the Bible or through Holy Communion.

### Taste, Smell and Touch

By the time Foxe was writing, Christian authors had long taken up Aristotle's division of substance and accident in order to explain the discrepancy between the physical appearance of the consecrated Host and its substance. While substance is the essence of a thing, its accidents, according to Aristotle, designate the object's or body's outward appearance or temporary state, such

24 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 999.

25 Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* 68ff.

26 Cf. Loades D., "Foxe in Theological Context", in the critical apparatus of the *TAMO* edition of the *Actes and Monuments*.

as 'beautiful', 'white', or 'seated'.<sup>27</sup> These accidents are distinct from a thing's properties in that they do not usually define it in relation to other things.<sup>28</sup> What is perceptible through the senses, therefore, is an object's accidents, not its substance. In an attempt to present the Protestant Church as a unified front despite its internal divisions, Foxe points out that both Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, although disagreeing on other points, were of one mind with regard to the substance of the Eucharist. 'For if the question be asked of them both', he writes, 'what is the material substaunce of the Sacrament, whiche our outward senses do behold & feelee: they will both confesse bread, and not the accidents onely of bread'.<sup>29</sup> From a Protestant point of view, then, what is seen, smelled, tasted and touched in the sacrament is plainly and simply bread, both in substance and outward form. In opposition to this, Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London during the reign of Queen Mary I, is said to have made the following statement: 'A Sacrament is the signe of a holy thing: So that there is both the signe which is the accident (as whitenes, roundness, and shape of bread) and there is also [the] thing it self, as very CHRIST both God and m[an]. But these hereticke[s] [i.e. the Protestants] will haue the Sacramentes to bee but bare signes'.<sup>30</sup> Foxe's Bonner thus argues that although the accidents of the sacrament remain the same after consecration, its substance is converted from bread to the 'very CHRIST'. From Bonner's Catholic point of view, it follows that it is Christ, not bread, that is consumed in Holy Communion.

Although the reformers and Protestant writers like Foxe contested this doctrine of transubstantiation, they maintained that the sensory consumption of the Eucharist had a spiritual effect. In a letter by the Protestant John Bradford, which Foxe reproduced after his account of the latter's martyrdom, this is explained as follows:

to the eyes of your reason, to your tast and corporall senses it is bread and wine, and therefore the scripture calleth it after the consecration so: euen so to the eies, tast, and senses of your faith [...] it is in very deede CHRISTES body and bloud, which spritually your soule feedeth on to euerlasting life in faith and by faith, euen as your body presently feedeth on the sacramentall bread and sacramentall wine.<sup>31</sup>

27 Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vol. 1, 170. See also his *Metaphysics* in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vol. 2, 1552–1728, book VII.

28 Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vol. 1, 170.

29 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1031.

30 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 2012.

31 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1871.

The real body and blood of Christ can indeed be seen, touched and tasted through one's 'senses of faith', whereas the sacramental bread and wine are perceptible through one's 'corporal senses'. These senses of faith, or *sensus spirituales*, had a long tradition in medieval religion and can be traced back to Origen of Alexandria in the second to third century. Origen, like Augustine<sup>32</sup> and later Aquinas,<sup>33</sup> posited that there are two ways of sensing, the corporal and the spiritual.<sup>34</sup> This view remained integral to post-Reformation Protestant doctrine.<sup>35</sup> As Bradford's letter shows, sixteenth-century Protestants maintained that even while both the accidents and the substance of the sacrament remained bread and wine, the bodily consumption thereof mirrored a spiritual sensory experience in which the body and blood of Christ could be seen, smelled, tasted and touched.

It is certainly no coincidence that Foxe's references to taste most often refer to the Eucharist or some other form of spiritual perception. William Tyndale, for example, is said to have received 'the first taste of God's truth' during his time at Magdalen College in Oxford.<sup>36</sup> What is more, this 'taste of God's truth' is further connected to addiction. In Oxford, Foxe writes, Tyndale 'increased as wel in the knowledge of tounge, and other liberall Artes, as especially in the

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- 32 Augustine argued in favour of the extramission theory in corporal sensing, but distinguished the *homo exterior* from the *homo interior*, the latter of which possesses 'a sense capacity that is able to perceive God'. Lootens M.R., "Augustine", in Gavriluk P.L. – Coakley S. (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: 2012) 56–70, 59; see also 57–61.
- 33 Aquinas holds that what is perceptible 'of God is his essence' (Cross R., "Thomas Aquinas", in Gavriluk P.L. – Coakley S. [eds.], *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* [Cambridge: 2012] 182). Essence in turn is perceptible by intellectual capacities (Cross, "Thomas Aquinas" 183).
- 34 Cf. Origen, *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* [*De Principiis*], ed. and trans. H. Görgemanns – J. Karpp, *Texte zur Forschung* 24 (Darmstadt: 1976) 120, lines 8–13: 'Sciebat [Salomon] namque duo genera esse sensuum in nobis, unum genus sensuum mortale, corruptibile, humanum, aliud genus immortale et intellectual, quod nunc "divinum" nominavit. Hoc ergo sensu divino non oculorum, sed "cordis mundi", quae est mens, deus videri ab his, qui digni sunt, potest.' ('For he [Solomon] knew there were two kinds of senses in us, one kind mortal, corruptible, human, the other kind immortal and intellectual, which he called "divine". With this divine sense not of the eyes, but of a "pure heart", which is the mind, can God be seen by those who are worthy.' My translation.)
- 35 See McInroy M.J., "Origen of Alexandria", in Gavriluk P.L. – Coakley S. (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: 2012) 20–35, 20ff.
- 36 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1263. Other martyrs are said to have had a 'taste of heavenly treasures' (1780), 'the taste of deathes cup' (114) or 'a blessed taste [...] of Gods holy spirite' (1706).

knowledge of the Scriptures: whereunto his mynde was singularly addicted'.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the spiritual taste of God's Truth, taken in through the Scriptures, can, according to Foxe, lead to spiritual addiction, just as corporeal tasting can lead to physical addiction. Alec Ryrie recently and aptly termed this '[b]iblical over-eating' in the Protestant tradition.<sup>38</sup> The term 'bibliophagia' has sometimes also been used to describe the early modern notion of 'tasting, eating, swallowing or digesting knowledge'.<sup>39</sup> Figuratively speaking, this presents a reversal of the medieval phenomenon of *anorexia mirabilis*, holy fasting, discussed by Caroline Walker Bynum and Rudolph Bell. In both instances, the sensory spiritual experience, connected to eating or the refusal to eat, is carried to extremes. This resembles Augustine's description of his conversion to Christianity in the *Confessions*, which presents Augustine's new-found faith in almost addictive terms:

Thou calledst and criedst unto me, yea thou even breakedst open my deafness: thou discoveredst thy beams and shinedst unto me, and didst chase away my blindness: thou didst most fragrantly blow upon me, and I drew in my breath and I pant after thee; I tasted thee, and now do hunger and thirst after thee; thou didst touch me, and I even burn again to enjoy thy peace.<sup>40</sup>

The conversion moment as described by Foxe is invariably triggered by the martyr's reading of the Scriptures. The Word of God can not only be seen, heard and touched but it can also be tasted and smelled, making the conversion experience one that requires, and speaks directly to, all the senses.<sup>41</sup> Truth,

37 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1263.

38 Ryrie A., *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: 2013) 271.

39 Craik K., *Reading Sensation in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke – New York: 2007) 94. This idea, Katharine Craik has shown, can be traced to Plutarch's *Moralia*, which parallels reading with the digestion of food: 'it is very pleasant to eat but it makes one's sleep full of bad dreams [...] Similarly also in the art of poetry there is much that is pleasant and nourishing for the mind of a youth, but quite as much that is disturbing' (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. F. Cole Babbitt [London – Cambridge: 1960] vol. 1, 74–197, at 77–79; cf. Craik, *Reading Sensation in Early Modern England* 93ff.).

40 Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. W. Watts., 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London, William Heinemann – New York, Macmillan: 1912; reprint, London – Cambridge, MA: 1977) vol. 2, 147.

41 Foxe's reproduction of Hugh Latimer's conversion account is exemplary of this: 'from that tyme forward [i.e. the time of his conversion] [he] began to smell the word of God,

contained in the Word of God, reveals itself through a transformative process that involves all five senses and ultimately changes the believer from within.

In much the same vein, William Thorpe writes in the preface to his examinations, which Foxe also included in the *Actes and Monuments*, that

truth [...] where euer it is impugned, it hath a swete smell, and therof commeth a sweete sauour. [...] And therefore, this heauenly smell of Gods woord, wyll not as a smoke passe away wyth the wynde: but it will descende and rest in some cleane soule, that thrusteth thereafter.<sup>42</sup>

Reminding us of the medieval belief that saints and their relics emit a sweet smell, Thorpe inextricably links the Word of God with a sweetness that can be detected by both smell and taste. However, this spiritual sensory experience is the prerogative of 'cleane soule[s]', i.e. true believers worthy of perceiving 'this heavenly smell'. This echoes Origen's formulation in his *De Principiis* where he writes that the 'divine' or spiritual senses are connected not to the body, but to 'cordis mundi', the pure heart, the mind.<sup>43</sup> It is through this divine sense, Origen continues, that God can be seen by those who are worthy.<sup>44</sup> By reproducing Thorpe's preface Foxe thus reiterates the Origenist notion of the spiritual senses alongside Aristotelian concepts of sense perception.

The notion of truth leaving behind a sweet smell is further exemplified in Foxe's description of the execution of Joan Hornes in May 1556. When Bishop Bonner questions her on the issue of transubstantiation, Joan answers: 'If you can make your God to sheed bloud, or to shew any condition of a true lyuely body, then will I beleue you: but it is but bread (as touching the substance thereof)'.<sup>45</sup> Bonner, Foxe writes,

was [...] to ignoraunt to conuince her, [and] knockt her downe with the butcherly axe of his sentence. And so the holy Virgine and Martyr committed to the shambles of the secular sworde, was offered vp [...]

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& forsake the scholdoctors, & such fooleries' (*The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1185).

42 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 650.

43 Origen, *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* 120, lines 11–13: 'Hoc ergo sensu divino non oculorum, sed "cordis mundi", quae est mens, deus videri ab his, qui digni sunt, potest'. ('With this divine sense, then, which does not pertain to the eyes, but to the pure heart, i.e. to reason, can God be seen by those who are worthy.')

44 Origen, *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* 120, lines 12f.

45 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 2130.



a burnt sacrifice to the Lord, in odorem bonæ fragrantiae, in the fauour of a sweete and pleasant smell.<sup>46</sup>

This, too, echoes the sweet smell of relics, evoking the very saints' cult Foxe is writing against. In their contribution to the present volume, Rory Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler discuss this notion of the 'odour of sanctity' in medieval religious drama. They show that play texts and individual performances connected sweet smells with Paradise and suggest that 'sweet odours took on an enhanced spiritual meaning' in particular theatrical contexts. As they remind us, '[d]ivinity itself was sweetly redolent' in the medieval imagination.<sup>47</sup> It becomes clear that the world Foxe is creating is no less enchanted than its pre-Reformation counterpart. What he does is to transpose traditional (sensory) metaphors and topoi so as to use them against the Roman Catholic Church. Martyrdom for Foxe means witnessing the truth of the reformed faith and since truth is thought to emit a sweet smell and savour, it follows that Protestant martyrdom should do the same.

While the truth of the Gospel leaves behind a sweet scent and taste in Foxe's book, heresy emits a foul, corrupted smell. Here, too, Foxe makes use of a long-standing topos, transposing and turning it against the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>48</sup> The following excerpt, in which Ralph Allerton is examined by Bishop Bonner, is one of several instances in which Foxe's martyrs are warned of making heretical statements by their Catholic interrogators:

Nay, but I pray thee let me heare more of thys geare. For I feare me thou wilt smell of an hereticke anone. Which is the true Church, as thou sayest? Doest thou not call the hereticke Church the true Church, or the Catholicke Church of Christ?<sup>49</sup>

Even while accusing Allerton of smelling of heresy, one can hardly miss the irony inherent in Bonner's statement. Throughout his martyrology, Foxe portrays Bonner as the worst of all Catholic prosecutors and describes his death as follows:

46 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 2131.

47 See "Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays" in this volume.

48 Cf. Classen C. – Howes D. – Synnott A., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London – New York: 1994) 52–54. Critten and Kern-Stähler discuss numerous examples in medieval literature that connect bad odours with sin, the devil and hell (see "Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays" in this volume).

49 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 2248.

boner, [...] as he had bene a persecutor of þ<sup>e</sup> light, and a child or [sic] darkenes, so his carcase was tumbled into the earth in obscure darknes at midnight [...] and as he had bene a murderer, so was he layd amongs theues and murderers, a place by Gods iudgement rightly appointed for him.<sup>50</sup>

If anyone smells of heresy, it is evident from Foxe's polemics that, to his mind, it is not Bonner's addressee in the previous passage, but the bishop himself. Significantly, this excerpt again makes use of sensory metaphors pertaining to sight and blindness. Bonner is not only a persecutor of individual Protestants but a persecutor of 'þ<sup>e</sup> light', i.e. of Truth, knowledge and learning. Earlier in the martyrology, Foxe addresses the reader by stating that: 'I neede not admonish thee to smell out the blinde practises of these night crowes [i.e. the Catholics], to blinde the world with foreged inuencions, in steede of true stories'.<sup>51</sup> Foxe's book, which he claims contains these 'true stories', is thus framed by a depiction of the Roman Catholic Church and its proponents that makes extensive use of sensory language and imagery. Catholics like Bonner, blinded by 'foreged inuencions', are juxtaposed with Protestant martyrs who are quite literally enlightened by the Tetragrammaton on Foxe's title page.

The question of who does or does not smell of heresy is crucial in the sixteenth-century discourse of martyrdom and sainthood. Foxe found his martyrology continuously attacked by Catholic writers, who denounced his fellow Protestants as 'pseudo-saints' and false martyrs. Foxe's reaction to their criticism was to do the same in return, denouncing traditional Catholic saints as saints of the pope's 'owne makynge'.<sup>52</sup> The following passage is exemplary of this debate. Among Foxe's Catholic critics was the theologian Thomas Dorman, who, according to Foxe,

nowe so vncharitably abuseth his penne [...], and rayleth so fiercely agaynst the bloud of Christes slayne seruantes [i.e. the Protestant martyrs], myschallyng them to be a donghill of stynking Martyrs. Well, how soeuer the sauour of these good Martyrs do sent in the nose of M. Dorman, I doubt not but they geue a better odour and sweter smell in

50 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 2353.

51 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 187.

52 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 713.

the presence of the Lord: *Preciosa enim in cōspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius*. Precious is in the sight of the Lord, the death of his saintes.<sup>53</sup>

It should be noted here that Foxe misattributes this to Dorman. The trope of the 'dunghill of stinking martyrs' was introduced not by Dorman, but by Thomas Harding, another of Foxe's Catholic critics.<sup>54</sup> However, this slip-up does not in any way undermine Foxe's case. If anything, it shows that the sensory language Foxe himself worked with was deployed by a number of his contemporaries and presented a common ground on which religious tensions and disagreements could be articulated, negotiated and clarified. Proper use of the senses, regardless of the respective authors' convictions, will have as its object the discernment of the true Church from heretical aberration. In the *Actes and Monuments*, then, the function of the senses is to distinguish between what is good and bad, true and false. Truth, in Foxe's Protestant view, is accessible only through the Scriptures, which, consequently, become central to Protestant sensing and come to replace the body of Christ as the prime object of sense experience.

### Conclusion

The Bible, and with it Truth, is presented by Foxe as something that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. All five senses are central to the spiritual experience of conversion, triggered by an equally sensory engagement with the Scriptures, and of the Lord's Supper. Foxe's use of sense perception in the *Actes and Monuments* illustrates that sixteenth-century Protestants, often viewed as austere and frugal, were no less concerned with the senses than their Catholic counterparts. As the above discussion has shown, asking which senses were privileged by Protestant and Catholic writers respectively is somewhat beside the point. Foxe does not simply shift the focus from one sense to

53 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1003.

54 Harding argues that death alone does not make a saint and that Foxe is wrong to hail Protestant heretics burned at the stake as martyrs: 'why make ye the burning of brethern an argument of the truth of your gospel, whereof the professors of those other sects have as great advantage as your owne sect? [...] And this is the chiefe argument ye make in in [sic] all that huge dongehill of your stinking martyrs, which ye have intituled Actes and monuments' (*Confutation of a Book Intituled an Apology of the Church of England* [Antwerp: 1565] 14).

the other, but encourages the use of all five senses in the spiritual experience of the Word of God. What changes in the Protestant tradition, then, is the object of sense perception, not the use of sense perception as such. While criticising the Catholic focus on the real presence of Christ in the transubstantiated Host, which is perceptible through the physical senses, Foxe emphasises the Scriptures as the primary object of spiritual sense perception. He makes use of a sensory language that involves all five senses and was shared by many of his contemporaries, regardless of their religious background. Even while attacking the traditional, Catholic saints' cult, Foxe presents his Protestant martyrs in much the same terms, describing their deaths at the stake as a sweet-smelling sacrifice as opposed to the foul corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. The opposition he establishes between the two Churches is very much formulated in sensory terms. He makes use of an existing framework, but adapts it to his new, Protestant ideology. Rather than adhering to the overly ascetic principle of 'eat not, taste not, touch not', then, Foxe's advice would more likely have been: 'eat, taste and touch' in order to discern 'truth from error' and 'religion from superstition'.<sup>55</sup>

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55 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1006.

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**PART 5**

*The Theatre as Sensory Experience*







# Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays<sup>1</sup>

Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler

## Introduction

In 2004, Richard Axel and Linda Buck won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their research into the organization of the olfactory system, which revealed that we can each distinguish between about 10,000 different odours. The Swedish Academy praised them for explicating what ‘had long remained the most enigmatic of our senses’: the sense of smell.<sup>2</sup> The role of smell in the past, however, continues to be enigmatic. While there is now a considerable number of studies on the history of sight, hearing, taste and touch, the history of olfaction has traditionally been neglected.<sup>3</sup> This gap in our knowledge might be attributed to two factors. First, smell has been denigrated as animal-like and primitive by a long line of intellectuals, and hence not considered an object worthy of academic enquiry.<sup>4</sup> Most infamously, perhaps, for Darwin,

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- 1 We would like to thank the members of the Medieval Research Seminar at the Faculty of English, University of Oxford, and the members of the Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
  - 2 “Press Release: 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine”, Nobel Assembly of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, October 4, 2004, <http://nobelprize.org/medicine/laureates/2004/press.html> (consulted 5 February 2014). See further Dugan H., *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: 2011) 1.
  - 3 The 1980s are generally seen as a watershed moment for smell studies across the disciplines of history, the social sciences, and literary and cultural studies. Foundational texts included Alain Corbin’s *Le Miasme et la jonquille* (1982; publication in English in 1986: *The Foul and the Fragrant*), which highlighted the significance of odour and its various associations in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, and Patrick Süskind’s bestseller *Das Parfum. Geschichte eines Mörders* (1985; publication in English in 1986: *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*), which was influenced by Corbin’s book. See further Drobnick J., “Introduction: Olfactocentrism”, in Drobnick J. (ed.), *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2006) 1–9, 3–4.
  - 4 See further Classen C. – Howes D. – Synnott A., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London etc., Routledge: 1994; reprint, London – New York: 2005) 3–5; Jenner M.S.R., “Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories”, *AHR Forum, American Historical Review* (2011) 335–351, 337–343; Guérer A. le, “Olfaction and Cognition: A Philosophical and Psychoanalytical View”,

the sense of smell was a 'rudimentary condition' inherited from 'some early progenitor' that was thus 'much more highly developed' in the 'dark coloured races of man' than in 'the white and civilised races'.<sup>5</sup> Second, cultural historians appear to have neglected the study of olfaction owing to a belief that smell is too ephemeral to be historicized. After all, the smells of the past have evaporated; as Classen, Howes and Synnott put it: 'We do not know what the past smelled like,' because 'smells cannot be preserved'.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to recapture these lost smells, a growing number of museums and publishers simulate the odours of the past and then release them in the form of scent trails, scratch-and-sniff panels and scent boxes to an audience eager to experience the stench of World War I trenches, the reek of Victorian sewers or the tang of medieval dung-heaps. Producing a combination of distinctive smells labelled 'fish market,' 'burned wood,' 'rubbish acrid' and others, in 1984 the Jorvik Viking Centre pioneered the use of scents to enhance visitors' experience of the past as they travel aboard a time capsule through Viking York.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Canterbury's visitor attraction, The Canterbury Tales, promises its visitors that they will experience not only the sights and sounds but also the 'smells of a bygone era'.<sup>8</sup> Such popularizing attempts to recover the smells of the past have been endorsed by a number of historians. Most notably, in his award-winning study, *Sensory Worlds of Early America* (2003), Peter Charles Hoffer has urged scholars to leave their desks and 'to follow children and their parents' to the scent trails and other sensory reproductions in living museums, which, he says, 'approximate the immediate sensory experiences of people' in the past.<sup>9</sup> These reconstructive efforts can only ever afford us a partial appreciation of the role of sense perception in past cultures, however. As the sensory historian Mark Smith has emphasized, it is also important to consider the extent to which sense experiences are subject to historical and cultural contingencies that can only ever be partially recovered, even within

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in Rouby C. et al. (eds.), *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition* (Cambridge: 2002) 3–15; Shiner L. – Kriskovets Y., "The Aesthetics of Smelly Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, 3 (2007) 273–286, 275–277.

5 Darwin C., *The Works of Charles Darwin*, ed. P.H. Barrett – R.B. Freeman (London: 1989) vol. 21: *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, part 1, 21–22.

6 Classen – Howes – Synnott, *Aroma* 204.

7 See <http://jorvik-viking-centre.co.uk/about-jorvik>. On the use of scent at the Jorvik Centre see Aggleton J. – Waskett L., "The Ability of Odours to Serve as State-Dependent Cues for Real-World Memories: Can Viking Smells Aid the Recall of Viking Experiences?", *British Journal of Psychology* 90 (1999) 1–7, 3.

8 See <http://www.canterburytales.org.uk>.

9 Hoffer P.C., *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: 2003) 2.

controlled museum contexts.<sup>10</sup> While it may be possible to produce the stench of a medieval dung-heap, it is impossible for us to consume that smell in the same way as those who smelled the dung in, say, fifteenth-century York.

Fortunately, the chemical reproduction of historical smells is not the only means we have of gauging their significance: archaeologists point to material traces of olfactory experiences that have survived the ravages of time, such as the remnants of burnt sacrifices, incense holders or portable containers for fragrant oils or holy waters such as ampullae and unguentaria,<sup>11</sup> and Mark Smith and others have reminded us of the abundance of olfactory evidence 'embedded in any number of texts'.<sup>12</sup> Scholars such as David Howes and C.M. Woolgar express unease concerning the use of this evidence, lamenting that 'we must make do with descriptions and recollections'<sup>13</sup> or commenting that our understanding is 'constrained' by our dependence on 'written descriptions for our information about the sense [of smell] and its operation'.<sup>14</sup> Rather than regretting the reliance on written evidence to which any discussion of the history of olfaction must be subject, we endorse the approach pursued by Holly Dugan, who finds in these texts an opportunity to access how people in the past 'produced, consumed and represented scents'.<sup>15</sup> As Dugan puts it in her study of perfume in early modern England, the language of olfaction makes invisible smells appear and functions as 'a historical archive of sensation'.<sup>16</sup> Sense historians have only recently begun to engage this archive.

The medieval drama is a synaesthetic artwork that offers its audiences a variety of sensory experiences and thus constitutes a rich source for historians

10 Smith M.M., "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History", *Journal of Social History* 40, 4 (2007) 841–858, 844–846.

11 See Hamilakis Y., *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect* (New York: 2013) 214–217; Brazinski P.A. – Fryxell A.R.P., "The Smell of Relics: Authenticating Sainly Bones and the Role of Scent in the Sensory Experience of Medieval Christian Veneration", *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 23, 1 (2013) 1–15. Ampullae were 'used by pilgrims to carry home drops of oil from the lamps in the holiest places of the shrine.' Bagnall R. – Rathbone D., *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians* (Los Angeles: 2004) 119. Unguentaria are 'narrow-necked flasks to contain perfumed oils or unguents', which were 'frequently deposited in burials, presumably to create sweet smells'. Hayes J.W., *Handbook of Mediterranean Roman Pottery* (London: 1997) 85.

12 Smith M.M., *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: 2008) 5.

13 Classen – Howes – Synnott, *Aroma* 3.

14 Woolgar C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: 2006) 117.

15 Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume* 11.

16 Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume* 5.

of perception. It has frequently been argued that, in order to understand medieval drama as theatre, all elements of the theatrical experience must be considered, but research to date has largely concentrated on the senses of sight and hearing.<sup>17</sup> The usefulness of a study considering the medieval drama's olfactory appeal is pointed to in the words of a well-known early fifteenth-century sermon, the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. Towards the beginning of this anti-theatrical tract, we read that 'miraclis pleyinge reversith [contradicts] Crist' for two related reasons:

Firste in taking to pley that that he toke into most earnest. The secound in taking to miraclis of oure fleys, of oure lustis, and of oure five wittis that that God tooc to the bringing in of his bitter deth and to teching of penaunse doinge, and to fleyinge of feding of oure wittis and to mortifying of hem.<sup>18</sup>

The syntax of this passage is rather difficult, but it would seem that what the anonymous author of *Miraclis Pleyinge* is trying to say here is that when we mobilize our flesh, our lusts and our five senses in our attendance at dramatic performances, we disrespect Christ's Incarnation. God took the five senses with which we are also endowed and suffered through them, and he did this in order to teach us to starve and to mortify those same senses: we ought not to excite and to feed them through artificial means, especially not during a purportedly devotional activity.

Undoubtedly, this author's understanding of the 'wittys' or senses as gateways to sin reflects a long tradition of viewing our sensory organs as portals via which we might be penetrated by temptation, a tradition which is further discussed in Sean Otto's and Richard Newhauser's contributions to this volume.<sup>19</sup> What interests us here is the emphasis the author of the *Tretise* places on the plurality of the sensual experiences supported by late medieval drama. Since he laments that *miraclis* abuse all five of our senses – 'oure five wittis that God tooc' – it is clear that his criticism extends beyond the visual and auditory stimulation offered by the entertainments that he condemns.<sup>20</sup> It

17 See for example King P., "Seeing and Hearing; Looking and Listening", *Early Theatre* 3 (2000) 155–166, 155.

18 *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. C. Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: 2011) lines 57–62.

19 See too Ashbrook Harvey S., *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 2006) 160–162.

20 The precise meaning of the *miraclis* referred to in this treatise has proven difficult to determine. We subscribe to Davidson's opinion that the term as used in this text 'appears

seems fair to conclude, then, that those entertainments must have developed a significant pan-sensory appeal. This should come as little surprise, at least so far as medieval drama's use of smell is concerned, since preliminary historical research suggests that the olfactory neutrality of much twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre may represent an aberration in the chronology of performance, not the norm.<sup>21</sup>

With a view to recovering some part of the plenitude of the sensory experience supported by late medieval drama, we have set out to reconstruct the smellscape of the York Corpus Christi Cycle. Our attempts to rediscover the uses and meanings of smell on the late medieval stage thus start with the biggest, the best-known, and the most extravagant of the extant cycle plays. At first glance, admittedly, this may not appear to be a particularly promising line of enquiry. A search through Kinneavy's *Concordance to the York Plays* for various forms and spellings of the words 'smell,' 'nose' and 'stench' returns no hits.<sup>22</sup> But all this really tells us is that these are not words that found their way into the mouths of actors on the pageant wagons at York. We think it would be a mistake to assume that the sense of smell was not engaged in performances of the cycle just because olfactory perception is not discussed *per se* by its performers. Indeed, it seems rather unlikely that the York play assumed a low olfactory profile when we consider the technical virtuosity employed in order to enhance the visual and auditory experience of the drama.<sup>23</sup>

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[...] to cover a very wide range of vernacular drama of a religious nature, especially plays on the Passion and on the lives and martyrdoms of the saints but also including non-sacred plays and summer games presented on religious festivals and Sundays' (*A Treatise* 120).

- 21 Sally Banes attributes the rise of a scentless theatre in the twentieth century to the conventions of fourth-wall theatre which 'generally divided the spectator from the mainstream stage and permitted only sight and sound to cross its divide' (29). See Banes S., "Olfactory Performances", in Banes S. – Lepecki A. (eds.), *The Senses in Performance* (London: 2007) 29–37. Farah Karim-Cooper's discussion in this volume highlights the pan-sensory appeal of early theatre; the theatre in Shakespeare's time, she writes, was 'a wild and complex sensorium'. On the early modern theatrical uses and meanings of incense in particular, see too Pickett H.C., "The Idolatrous Nose: Incense on the Early Modern Stage", in Degenhardt J.H. – Williamson E. (eds.), *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage* (Farnham: 2011) 19–37.
- 22 Kinneavy G.B., *A Concordance to the York Plays* (New York – London: 1986). The word 'scent' in its various spellings occurs only as the past participle of the verb 'send.'
- 23 This virtuosity has been highlighted in a range of recent performance-based studies, from among which we might cite the discussion of Moses's magic wand in the York Hosiers' Pharaoh and Moses (Play 11), in Butterworth P., *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: 2005) 177–178; the account of the machinery needed to elevate the cross in the Pinners' Crucifixio Christi (Play 35), in Aronson-Lehavi S., "Raising the Cross:

Central to our argument is the conviction that the York play-text can reveal most about the performance life of the Corpus Christi cycle when it is set alongside a variety of parallel sources of evidence, including contemporaneous ideas about sense perception, records of analogous drama, the visual arts, and historical and archaeological studies of the city of York. We thus propose to collate and to contextualize a series of references to smells and their production that are scattered throughout the York play-text. By so proceeding, we hope to elucidate some of the ways in which these references might have signified for their audiences and perhaps have been carried over in performance. This is what it means for us to engage Dugan's 'historical archive of sensation'. Our method is comparative and speculative, and we have attempted at all times to keep a directorial eye – or, rather, nose – trained on the play-text's realizable potential. We begin with a consideration of the ways in which the York Play deploys unpleasant smells in order to underline a range of theological, devotional and comic points. Here we feel we are on the safest ground: the York play-text provides clear evidence of an interest in the stench of sin and its artificial reproduction. What is more, historical, archaeological and pathoecological studies on York suggest ways in which the particular economy and geography of the town lent itself to an especially fragrant exploration of these topics. On the subject of the cycle's deployment of pleasant smells it must be admitted that the textual evidence we have to work with in the York play-text is less rich and more broadly scattered, but we hope that a comparative approach to these briefer references will begin to suggest ways in which they might have engaged medieval audiences, actors and directors.

### Unpleasant Smells: Smoke and Filth

Middle English includes a large vocabulary for describing unpleasant smells. Many of these words carry both literal and figural valences: the meanings of the adjective 'foul' for example comprised 'dirty', 'rotten' and 'stinking' as well as 'evil' and 'sinful'; and the noun 'filth' was used for both putrid matter and matter conducive to moral corruption (MED, 'foul', 1a, 1b, 3; 'filth', 1, 3). The fifteenth-century sermon cycle *Jacob's Well* compares the moral corruption of the body by sin to the rotting of an apple, whereby something sweet-smelling and virtuous is turned into something stinking in the sight of God: 'Also as roty-

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Pre-Textual Theatricality and the York Crucifixion Play", in Rogerson M. (ed.), *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City* (Woodbridge: 2011) 165–179; and the magisterial account of the music written to accompany York's individual pageants in Rastall R., *Music in Early English Religious Drama*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: 1996–2001).

hed doth away þe swete smel & þe good odour of an appyll so dooth synne away the smel of swetnesse of vertuys out of þi lyif and makyth þi lyvyng to stynke in þe sy3t of God'.<sup>24</sup> As the ultimate sinner, the Devil was understood to be foul-smelling, reeking of excrement and sulphur, and written and pictorial accounts of hell foregrounded the olfactory quality of the place. Dante's *Inferno* (Book XI) first springs to mind,<sup>25</sup> but there are countless other descriptions: Thomas Aquinas speaks of the 'reeky' fires of hell,<sup>26</sup> as does Hildegard of Bingen, who describes hell as a 'long and wide marsh [...] emitting the worst stink'.<sup>27</sup> The 'stynkyng stynk' of hell (CT x.209) is also included in the list of infernal torments with which Chaucer's Parson brings home the 'terror of what will be the sensory experiences of sinners for an eternity of hell', as Richard Newhauser puts it elsewhere in this volume.<sup>28</sup> Others take up the topographical feature added to Purgatory by Gregory the Great of a bridge across a stinking river which carries sinners to hell.<sup>29</sup> For instance, Robert Brunne's confessional manual *Handlyng Synne* recounts a vision of the final judgement, replete with 'stynkynge' water from the river carrying the sinful down into the abyss.<sup>30</sup> Finally, in a fifteenth-century stained-glass window from a parish church in East Sussex, the olfactory assault suffered by sinners in hell is suggested by the figure in the foreground who is holding his nose [Fig. 11.1].<sup>31</sup>

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- 24 Cited in Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* 124. Further examples of the association of bad odour with sin are listed in Classen C., *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London: 2005) 47–50.
- 25 See especially the first lines of Canto XI, where Dante speaks of the 'horrible stench' ('*Terribile soperchio*', line 4) coming out of the abyss: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans., with a commentary, by C.S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX (Princeton: 1970) vol. 1: Italian text and translation, 108–109.
- 26 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, "Treatise on the Last Things", Question 97, Art. 4: *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. by D.J. Sullivan (Chicago – London – Toronto: 1952) vol. 2, 1068.
- 27 Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of the Rewards of Life*, trans. B. Hozeski (New York: 1994) 157. Further examples of hell as a foul-smelling place are given in Classen C., "The Breath of God: Sacred Histories of Scent", in Drobnick J. (ed.), *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2006) 375–390, 382–384.
- 28 The citation from Chaucer is taken from Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale", *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: 1987).
- 29 Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. O.J. Zimmerman, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 39 (Washington, D.C.: 1959; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: 1995) 239.
- 30 Mannyng Robert, *Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne*, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS (London: 1901) 50–51, lines 1387 and 1419–1422.
- 31 On the foul odours associated with hell, see further Seiler T.H., "Filth and Stench as Aspects of the Iconography of Hell", in Davidson C. – Seiler T.H. (eds.), *The Iconography of Hell* (Kalamazoo, MI: 1992) 132–140.





FIGURE 11.1 *Detail from the Doom Window, St Mary the Virgin, Ticehurst, East Sussex. 15th century.*

PHOTO © PAINTON COWEN FROM *ENGLISH STAINED GLASS*, THAMES & HUDSON LTD., LONDON

In a number of medieval cycle plays, the putrid stench of the devil and hell is evoked by references to the devil's chronic flatulence.<sup>32</sup> In the N-Town play, the devil lets off a fart directly after his fall from heaven:

LUCIFERE: Now to helle the way I take,  
In endeles peyn ther to be pyht [set].  
For fere of fyre a fart I crake  
In helle donjoon, myn dene is dyth [prepared]!<sup>33</sup>

More devilish farts follow. After he is punished for bringing about the Fall of Adam and Eve and has crept home to his 'stynkyng stalle', he breaks his breeches with a fart:

DIABOLUS: I krepe hom to my stynkyng stalle.  
Helle pyt and hevyn halle  
Shul do thi byddyng bone.  
I falle down here a fowle freke.  
For this falle I gynne to qweke –  
With a fart my brech I breke –  
My sorwe comyth ful sone.<sup>34</sup>

Then, after he fails to tempt Jesus in the desert, he once more 'lete[s] a crakke'.<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that, here and elsewhere, elaborate stage devices were employed in order to produce these devilish farts. For instance, the plan preceding the play-text of the *Castle of Perseverance* asks the actor playing the devil to 'have gunnepowdyr brennyng in pypys in hys handys and in hys eyrs and in hys ars'.<sup>36</sup>

A key component of the medieval understanding of hell was, then, that it was a foul-smelling place characterized by choking fires and filth. In view of this long tradition of associating hell and the devil with filth and choking stench it is not surprising that bad smells are produced or alluded to in pageants at York that feature the devil. In the Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer (Play 1), the angels-turned-devils complain of the great heat in their

32 Richard Newhauser discusses the significance of the fart in the "Summoner's Tale" in his contribution to this volume.

33 *N-Town Play* 1, lines 79–82. Here and elsewhere, we cite by play and line number from *The N-Town Plays*, ed. D. Sugano (Kalamazoo, MI: 2007).

34 *N-Town Play* 2, lines 268–274.

35 *N-Town Play* 23, line 195.

36 *The Castle of Perseverance*, ed. D.N. Klausner (Kalamazoo, MI: 2010) 9.

new dwelling-place and of being smothered in smoke.<sup>37</sup> In this play as well as in the Harrowing of Hell and Doomsday Plays (Plays 37 and 47), the smoke of hell would almost certainly have been provided by some kind of onstage fire at a hell mouth, that is, at a structure, probably onstage, designed to represent the gates of hell.<sup>38</sup> References to such a structure are to be found in documents detailing performance practice at York and at Coventry.<sup>39</sup> In the case of Coventry, moreover, records of payment referring to the keeping of a fire at hell mouth have survived, detailing payment for the 'kepyng of hell mowthe & the fyre'.<sup>40</sup> Such stage fires might produce not only light, heat, and smoke, but also pungent smells, particularly if pitch or sulphur were burned. The smoke from sulphur fires enveloped actors and audiences in a smell traditionally associated with the devil and hell and thus offered a multisensory experience that assailed not only eyes and ears but also noses.

Another way to generate noxious smoke was to burn bad wheat. One such smelly fire would appear directly to have been called for at York in the Cain and Abel Play (Play 7) when Cain makes his offering of poor grain. The York play-text is unfortunately defective at this moment: the preparation of the wheat fire is recorded but the leaves containing the actual burning have become detached from the codex containing the play-text. It seems safe to assume that Cain's fire was reproduced on stage, however, since God's rejection of Cain's gift is a fundamental element in the story narrated in the pageant. By comparison, in the raucous Towneley Murder of Abel (Play 2) an olfactory confirmation of the insufficiency of Cain's gift is set centre stage in lines that describe, first, the difficulties Cain has setting his offering ablaze, and, second, the terrible smell produced by his burning wheat:

We! out, haro! help to blaw!  
It will not bren for me, I traw.  
Puf! this smoke dos me mych shame –

37 *York Play* 1, lines 97 and 117. We cite the York play-text by play and line number from *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. C. Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: 2011).

38 See discussions in Sheingorn P., "Who Can Open the Doors of His Face? The Iconography of Hell Mouth" and Meredith P., "The Iconography of Hell in the English Cycles: A Practical Perspective", in Davidson – Seiler, *The Iconography of Hell* 1–19 and 158–186.

39 See *Coventry: Records of Early English Drama*, ed. R.W. Ingram (Toronto: 1981) for example 167, 242, 245, 256, 469, 472 and *York: Records of Early English Drama*, ed. A.F. Johnston – M. Rogerson, 2 vols. (Toronto: 1979) vol. 1, 55, 242. These and similar references are discussed in Butterworth P., "Hellfire: Flame as Special Effect", in Davidson – Seiler, *The Iconography of Hell* 67–101.

40 Ingram, *Coventry* 221.

Now bren in the dwillys name!  
 A! What dwill of hell is it?  
 Almost had myne breth beyn dit;  
 Had I blawen oone blast more,  
 I had beyn choked right thore.  
 It stank like the dwill in hell,  
 That longer ther myght I not dwell.<sup>41</sup>

Onstage fires were not the only means of bringing forth the stench of sin and the stifling fires of hell. In the York drama, the audience's attention is repeatedly drawn to the filthiness of the Play's devils. In the Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer, one of the unfallen angels praises God for letting them dwell in a place 'ther never felyng of fylth may full us nor fade us';<sup>42</sup> God subsequently juxtaposes the undefiled angels with those who have fallen 'into fylthe that evermore sall fade tham'.<sup>43</sup> One of the devils goes on to complain that they will have nothing to feed on but 'filth we fynde us befor'.<sup>44</sup> In the York Harrowing of Hell (Play 37), the insistence on the filthiness of hell makes a further appearance in the words of King David, who speaks of hell as a place that is 'full of filthe'.<sup>45</sup>

The association of hell with filth was probably underlined in the Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer by the stage presence of its traditional producing guild, the tanners. The tanners prepared animal hides for manufacture into leather goods, and they were most likely not given this pageant coincidentally, both in York and in other places such as Chester, where it was also the tanners who were responsible for staging the Fall of Lucifer (Chester Play 1).<sup>46</sup> As Alan D. Justice points out, these leatherworkers would have been particularly well-placed to enhance the olfactory aspect of their pageant:

The equipment used in the tanning process included large pits in which raw hides were put to soak in noxious, caustic solutions. In the pageant, when Lucifer falls from heaven, he tumbles into a pit of filth, the nature

41 *Towneley Play* 2, lines 277–286. We cite this play-text by play and line number from *The Towneley Plays*, ed. M. Stevens – A.C. Cawley, 2 vols. (Oxford: 1994).

42 *York Play* 1, line 60.

43 *York Play* 1, line 132.

44 *York Play* 1, line 106.

45 *York Play* 37, line 380.

46 See *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Luminansky – D. Mills (Oxford: 1974). Subsequent citations of the Chester plays are given from this edition by play and line number.

of which may be surmised: dung [and, as other authors have added, urine and fermented rye or barley<sup>47</sup>] was sometimes used as an ingredient in the tanning process. An analogy between the tanner's pit and the pit of hell is not difficult to make.<sup>48</sup>

The association of the tanners with stench and pollution would not have been lost on a medieval audience who, we know, frequently complained about the stench and pollution generated by the tanning process, which was for this reason eventually restricted to the fringes of towns.<sup>49</sup> Whether the tanners in their staging of the Fall of the Angels made use of some of their evil-smelling concoctions to generate the smell of hell, whether they counted on the odours clinging to their bodies as a corollary of their craft to do so, or whether they simply relied on the power of association to conjure up an imaginary stench must remain conjectural.

The producers of the York Play could have exploited not only the particularities of the local labour force but also of the geography of the town itself. From archaeological evidence and pathoecological research,<sup>50</sup> we know that several sites of extreme pollution and stench were located in York, a city that proved stubbornly immune to efforts to clean and sanitize it and that remained renowned for its pervasive smells throughout the period during which the Corpus Christi Plays were performed. After visiting York in 1332, Edward III wrote of 'the abominable smell abounding in the said city more than in any other city of the realm from dung and manure and other filth and dirt where-with the streets and lanes are filled and obstructed' and ordered the streets 'to be cleansed from such filth [...] and to be kept clean',<sup>51</sup> but the city council's continuous efforts to improve York's environmental conditions – recorded for the period between the eleventh and the sixteenth century – suggest that these were still considered unacceptable well into the later Middle Ages.<sup>52</sup> What had changed by the fifteenth century was that waste disposal was assigned to a

47 Armor N.R., *Late Medieval Ipswich: Trade and Industry* (Woodbridge: 2011) 108–109; King G. – Henderson C., "Living Cheek by Jowl: The Pathoecology of Medieval York", *Quaternary International* 30 (2013) 1–12, 3.

48 Justice A.D., "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle", *Theatre Journal* 31, 1 (1979) 47–58, 56.

49 See e.g. Kowaleski M., *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval England* (Cambridge: 1995) 161 and Armor, *Late Medieval Ipswich* 108–109.

50 'Pathoecology,' as King and Henderson define it, 'is the study of the intersection of the abiotic, biotic and cultural environments of disease': King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 2.

51 Cited King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 2–3.

52 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 1.



number of locations, where dung carts placed in every ward were to off-load their waste.<sup>53</sup> Several of these smelly disposal sites at York coincided with locations at which the play was performed along the route followed by the pageant wagons. One of the first stations at which the wagons stopped was at Ousegate, where public latrines financed by the council in 1367 were situated.<sup>54</sup> Other sites of possible stench were the first two stops on Micklegate, west of which was Tanner Row. Here the medieval tan pits situated behind the houses would have given off their distinctive smell.<sup>55</sup> The stop on Pavement would have been another smelly station, with Hungate to the east, where a waste disposal area was situated, and with St Saviourgate to the north-east, which housed pits containing animal and human faeces.<sup>56</sup> Finally, a putrid smell was also generated by the burning of coal (in particular sea coal), which resulted in the release of sulphur oxide.<sup>57</sup> Harmful concentrations of this gas have been estimated for fourteenth- to seventeenth-century York,<sup>58</sup> from which we can surmise that the city's odour was indeed infernally noxious. Clearly, the frequent evocation of the filth in which the York Play's various devils dwell were apt to assume a new charge when performed in the midst of just such foul smelling vapours and materials, which must have presented themselves as an obvious point of reference – or even as a prop – for actors gesturing on stage.

Contemporary visual art gives a sense of the forms these gestures took.<sup>59</sup> In the stained-glass window referred to above, which depicts the torments of hell [Fig. 11.1], the presence of tormenting odours is evoked by one of the naked souls holding his nose. This gesture is also part of the conventional iconography of the Raising of Lazarus [Fig. 11.2]. Martha's concern about the stench of decay emitting from the body of Lazarus is suggested by her response to Jesus'

53 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 5.

54 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 5.

55 Until the fifteenth century, the tanners had their residence on Tanner Row: Hargrove W., *History and Description of the Ancient City of York*, 2 vols. (York, Herald-Office: 1818; reprint, London: 2013) vol. 2: *The Strangers' Guide* 181.

56 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 5.

57 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 3; Jacobson M.Z., *Atmospheric Pollution: History, Science, and Regulation* (Cambridge: 2002) 82. Sea coal, which was first introduced to London in 1228 (Jacobson, *Atmospheric Pollution* 82) was burned in York from at least 1371 and until at least the late sixteenth century: King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 3.

58 King – Henderson, "Living Cheek by Jowl" 4.

59 On the interrelation between medieval drama and the visual arts more generally, see for example Stevens M., "The Intertextuality of Late Medieval Art and Drama", *New Literary History* 22, 3 (1991) 317–337; Sheingorn P., "On Using Medieval Art in the Study of Medieval Drama", *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 22 (1979) 101–109.



FIGURE 11.2 *The Raising of Lazarus. Book of Hours, Dutch, 15th century. The Bodleian Libraries, The University of Oxford, Ms Buchanan 1, fol. 130v.*

IMAGE © BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

request to take away the stone from Lazarus's tomb four days after his burial: 'Lord, he stynkith now' (John 11:39).<sup>60</sup> This concern was further embellished in liturgical drama:

You will not be able to bear  
The stench of the dead man;  
For truly, stinking oppressively,  
He has been dead four days.<sup>61</sup>

Remarks expressing anxieties about the stench of Lazarus were often doubled in medieval visual art by a group of bystanders at the tomb who covered their noses in anticipation of the stench emanating from the dead body. In the Chester Lazarus Play, for example, they might have accompanied Martha's warning 'now he stinketh'.<sup>62</sup> Such a gesture was also available to actors wishing to underline the expectation of stench at this moment in the biblical narrative or elsewhere, perhaps too, as in the Lazarus episode, where such a foul smell was finally – miraculously – not produced.

### Pleasant Smells: Spices, Flowers and Incense

While the devil was said to emit a foul stench, the bodies of saints were believed to give off a pleasant fragrance, known as the odour of sanctity.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes further described as sweet, flower- or honey-like, this fragrance was thought since late antiquity to accompany miracles, the opening of a tomb of a saint, and the death of saintly individuals, especially martyrs.<sup>64</sup> A pleasant smell also became a means of confirming the authenticity of saintly relics.<sup>65</sup> Indeed,

60 Here and elsewhere we cite the Bible in the Wycliffite version edited by Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books*, 4 vols. (Oxford: 1850).

61 Hilarius, "The Rising of Lazarus (Suscitatio Lazari)", in *Medieval Drama*, ed. D. Bevington (Boston etc.: 1975) 162 and 163, lines 185–188. Cf. Pseudo-Macarios: 'For Lazarus alone, whom the Lord raised up, exuded so fetid an odor that no one could approach his tomb' (cited in Ashbrook Harvey S., "On Holy Stench: When the Odor of Sanctity Sickens", *Studia Patristica XIII: International Conference on Patristic Studies* 35 [2001] 90–101).

62 *Chester Play* 13, line 415.

63 See further Classen, "The Breath of God" 375–382.

64 Atchley E.G.C.F., *A History of the Use of Incense in Divine Worship* (London et al: Longmans, Green 1909) 108.

65 Brazinski – Fryxell, "The Smell of Relics" 12.



according to Judeo-Christian tradition, Divinity itself was sweetly redolent. Wisdom's words in Ecclesiasticus 24:20–21 were often cited, where Wisdom describes how she came forth from the mouth of the Mighty One and took her place among his people, breathing out an aromatic scent:

As canel and balsam smellende, I 3af smel; and as chose myrre I 3af swotnesse of smel. And as torax, and galban, and vngula, and gutta, and as Liban not kut, I smekede my dwelling; and as balsame not mengd is my smel.

From the earliest periods of Christianity, aromatic scents emitting from flowers, herbs, and, above all, incense, were employed in the church liturgy. Departing from the traditions of ancient Judaism, particularly the instructions in Exodus 30 for building an incense altar, incense was deployed by Christians as early as the fourth century; it was in widespread use by the tenth century. Its meanings and employment are varied and have been outlined most extensively by Edward Atchley.<sup>66</sup> Incense was equated with prayer, travelling heavenward, and being pleasing to God; 'Be forth riȝt reulid myn orisoun as encens in thi siȝt' runs the second verse of Psalm 140. In the early fifteenth-century anonymous treatise *Dives and Pauper*, Pauper, a poor itinerant preacher, explains to his interlocutor, the aristocratic Dives, that incense *is* prayer:

For be þe censer is vnderstondyn mannys herte; be þe cens, holy preyere; be þe feir, charite. [...] [A]s þe encens be hete of þe feir smellyȝt swete and steyith vp to heueneward so shuldyn þey lyftyn vp here hertys wyt deuocioun and makyn here preyȝerys in charite þat þey myyghtyn been plesaunt to God and wenyn vp to God.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, incense was associated with holy places and it was burned to demarcate and purify sacred spaces.<sup>68</sup> Thus Thomas Aquinas writes that the reason for employing incense at Holy Communion was 'out of reverence for this sacrament [The Holy Eucharist], in order that any disagreeable smell (arising from the number of persons gathered together) in the building, that could

66 Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense*.

67 *Dives and Pauper*, ed. P.H. Barnum, EETS (London – New York – Toronto: 1976) vol. 1, 111–112.

68 Spicer A. – Hamilton S., "Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space", in Spicer A. – Hamilton S. (eds.), *Defining the Holy Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: 2006) 1–23, 7.

cause annoyance, might be dispelled by its fragranc<sup>y</sup>.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, we read in the *Golden Legend* that incense was thought to have been used to purify the air in the stable at the Nativity;<sup>70</sup> according to the Augustinian canon John Mirk, this is how Joseph used the gift of incense, namely 'to put away the stench of the stabull ther [Mary] lay'.<sup>71</sup> This is the use attributed to incense in the Chester Play of the Magi's Gifts (Chester Play 9):

SECUNDUS REX: And I will offer through Godes grace  
incense that noble savoure hasse.  
Stynke of the stable yt shall wast [overcome],  
theras they be lent.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, a thirteenth-century stained-glass window at St Oswald's church in Ashborne, Derbyshire, indicates that the thurible used to dispense incense could form an integral part of the iconography of the Adoration of the Magi [Fig. 11.3].

In the York, Chester, Towneley and N-Town play cycles, aromatic smells are referred to as the product of herbs, spices, flowers, manna and incense. The Creation plays typically conjure up a rich smellscape. In the N-Town Creation of the World (Play 2), God stresses the olfactory appeal of Paradise, which, he says contains '[b]othe erbe and floure of suete smellyng'<sup>73</sup> and sweet smelling spices: 'Here is pepyr, pyan [peony], and swete lycorys'.<sup>74</sup> The flowers referred to in these citations might have been scattered about out on stage. We know from a stage direction for a Paradise play performed at Angers in 1456 that directors ordered the use of roses and other flowers that had been 'f[r]ais couppez' [freshly cut] on the day of the play's production; they were moreover to be put on stage in vessels filled with water in order to keep them as fresh as possible.<sup>75</sup>

69 *Summa Theologiae* 3a, 83, 5. We quote the English translation provided by Atchley, *The Use of Incense* 204.

70 *Gilte Legende*, ed. R. Hamer, with the assistance of Vida Russell, 3 vols., EETS (Oxford: 2006) vol. 1, 86.

71 *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)*, ed. T. Erbe, 2 parts, EETS (London: 1905) part 1, 49.

72 *Chester Play* 9, lines 52–55.

73 *N-Town Play* 2, line 7.

74 *N-Town Play* 2, line 35.

75 *Le Mystère de la Résurrection: Angers (1456): Edition Critique*, ed. P. Servet (Geneva: 1993) vol. 1, 318.



FIGURE 11.3 *Adoration of the Magi. St. Oswald, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, 13th century.*  
 PHOTO © PAINTON COWEN FROM *ENGLISH STAINED GLASS*, THAMES &  
 HUDSON LTD., LONDON.

York's English analogues also provide explicit evidence for the use of flowers on stage. In the N-Town Entry into Jerusalem, one of the citizens awaiting Jesus's arrival suggests that they should prepare a fragrant welcome for Christ:

Late us than welcom hym with flowrys and brawnychis of the tre,  
For he wole take that to plesawns becawse of redolens.<sup>76</sup>

That this speaker's suggestion was taken up in performances of the play is demonstrated by the stage direction describing Christ's subsequent entry:

*Here Cryst passyth forth. Ther metyth with hym a serteyn of chylderyn with flowrys and cast beforn hym. And they synggyn "Gloria laus".*<sup>77</sup>

As Eamon Duffy has shown, these plays reflect the tradition of the Palm Sunday procession, where branches and flowers such as willow, box and yew were blessed and distributed, and where children sometimes strewed the procession path with flowers.<sup>78</sup> Churchwardens' accounts suggest that such cuttings were regularly used in parish churches around the country at the time of this feast. Entries for Palm Sunday 1517 at St Martin's Church in Outwich, London, mention payments for 'palme & box & bred, iv d.,'<sup>79</sup> with 'palme' referring to the branches of trees substituting for the real palm fronds on the occasion of Palm Sunday, such as willow or yew (OED, 'palm' 3a).

Clearly, flowers strewn on stage were too far away to be smelled by most members of the audience; at York what feeble odour they might have produced would seem likely to have been drowned out by the noxious smells abounding in the town. It may even be that imitation flowers were used that were made of cloth or some other material, in which case they would have produced no smells at all: this appears to have been the case for at least a part of the décor described in the Angers stage direction mentioned above, which besides the freshly cut flowers also calls for branches charged with 'fruyts de diverses especes comme cerises, prunes, almandes, oranges, grenades, poires, pommes, figues, raisins et telles choses artificielement faictes' [fruits of various kinds such as cherries, plumbs, almonds, oranges, pomegranates, pears, apples, figs, grapes and such things artificially made].<sup>80</sup> The best way of thinking about these stage flowers, and about their evocation in the words of the actors at York, may thus be to consider their function as olfactory stimulants:

76 *N-Town Play* 26, lines 448–449.

77 *N-Town Play* 26, sd. line 453.

78 Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (New Haven etc.: 1993) 23–25.

79 Feasey H.J., *Ancient English Holy Week Ceremonial* (London: 1857) 57.

80 *Le Mystère de la Résurrection* vol. 1, 318.

neuroscientists today refer to the generation of mental images of odours with the terms 'odour imaging' or 'olfactory imagery'; apparently, familiar odours, like those created by flowers, are easier to imagine than others.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps in an infernally smelly town such as York, in which pleasant smells could only be dreamed of or remembered, the idea of sweet odours took on an enhanced spiritual meaning;<sup>82</sup> or perhaps, in the stinking streets of the town, allusion to the presence of patently absent sweet odours could have been exploited by the performers of the York pageants to humorous effect.

Since the liturgies of the Virgin that influenced late medieval drama were particularly rich in olfactory language, it is in the plays featuring the Virgin Mary that we most expect to find references to sweet scents. The liturgies for the feasts of the Nativity, the Assumption and the Purification of the Virgin applied verses from the Song of Solomon, with its profusion of sensuous imagery, to Mary.<sup>83</sup> She was identified, for example, with the woman 'that stezeth vp bi desert, as a lytil zerde of smoke of the swote spices, of myrre, and of encens, and of alle pymentarie poudre' (Song of Solomon, 3:6). An anonymous Middle English Marian lyric of the Assumption takes up the Virgin's sweet fragrance, praising '[t]he odour of hir mowthe aromatike';<sup>84</sup> and in a sermon on the nativity of the Virgin Mary, John Mirk likens Mary to a spicer's shop: 'Thus ys scho lyknet to a spycerys schoppe; for as a spycers schoppe smelleþe swete of dyuerse spices, soo scho for þe presens of þe Holy Gost þat was yn hur, and þe abundance of vertues þat scho smellyth swettyr þen any worldly spycery'.<sup>85</sup>

The feast of the Assumption of the Virgin held a particular olfactory appeal. The aromas of herbs, spices and flowers were used to signify Mary's victory over death that was celebrated in this feast. Periwinkle, verbena, thyme and other herbs and plants were laid on the altar, blessed and incensed.<sup>86</sup> A stage direction for the *Mystères des Actes des Apôtres* held at Bourges in April 1536

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- 81 Djordjevic J. – Zatorre R.J. – Petrides M. – Jones-Gotman M., "The Mind's Nose: Effects of Odor and Visual Imagery on Odor Detection", *Psychological Science* 15, 3 (2004) 143–148.
- 82 Compare the discussion of the access to the divine afforded by the garlands of roses and lilies gifted to Valerian and Cecilia in Chaucer's "Second Nun's Tale" in Robertson E., "Apprehending the Divine and Choosing to Believe: Voluntarist Free Will in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*", *Chaucer Review* 46 (2011) 111–130.
- 83 Matter E.A., *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: 1990) 39; Gold P.S., *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago – London: 1985) 59.
- 84 "The Assumption and Mary as Queen of Heaven", in *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. K. Saupe (Kalamazoo, MI: 1998) 112–117, 113, line 11.
- 85 *Mirk's Festial* 246.
- 86 Warner M., *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 2nd ed. (London, Weidenfeld – Nicolson: 1976; reprint, Oxford: 2013) 103.



provides evidence for the employment of perfumes at this particular moment in the theatrical representation of the career of Christ's mother. When the actor playing Jesus approached Mary's deathbed, accompanied by a host of angels, aroma was dispersed: 'A lheure que Jhscrist entre en la chambre de ladite Vierge fault qu'il se face grant odeur de quelques senteurs'.<sup>87</sup> ['At the moment that Jesus Christ enters the chamber of the Blessed Virgin there must be made a strong scent of different perfumes.']

On the English medieval stage, the Virgin's sweet fragrance appears frequently to have been realized through the use of incense. The N-Town play-text and stage directions are explicit on this point. Incense is directly called for in the N-Town Assumption of Mary (Play 41). At the moment of the Virgin's Inhumation, Peter's words are followed by a stage direction:

Now, holy brether, this body let us take,  
And wyth alle the worschepe we may ley it in the grave,  
Kyssyng it alle atonys for her sonys sake.  
Now, insence ye, and we schal put her in this cave.

*Hic ponent corpus in sepulcrum, insensantes, et cantantes.*<sup>88</sup>

Other sweet smells would appear to be required in the N-Town Mary plays, where the actor playing the Virgin draws attention to the sweet smelling manna on which Mary feeds during her stay at the temple prior to her marriage:

I shal fede me of this fode my Lord hath me sent.  
All maner of savowrys in this mete I fynde!  
I felt nevyr non so swete ner so redolent.<sup>89</sup>

However, incense was used not only in plays which appear to have been written for indoor performance, as is the case with the N-Town Mary Plays, but also in plays known to have been performed outside. When in the Chester Nativity Play Sybbell tells Octavian of Christ's birth, Octavian signals his wonder and a change in attitude towards his own rule by censuring the stage:

OCTAVIAN: A, Sibbell, this is a wondrous sight,  
for yonder I see a mayden bright,

87 *Mystère des Actes des Apôtres, représenté à Bourges en avril 1536*, ed. Baron Auguste de Girardot (Paris, J. Claye: 1854) 13.

88 *N-Town Play* 41, lines 449–452 and sd.

89 *N-Town Play* 9, lines 255–257.

a yonge chylde in her armes clight,  
 a bright crosse in his head.  
 Honour I wyll that sweete wight  
 with incense throughowt all my might,  
 for that reverence is most right,  
 if that yt bee thy reade.

Incense bringe, I command, in hye  
 to honour this child, kinge of mercye.  
 Should I bee God? Naye, naye, witterlye!  
 Great wronge iyws yt were.  
 For this childe is more worthye  
 then such a thowsande as am I.  
 Therefore to God moste mightye  
 incense I offer here.<sup>90</sup>

On the effects produced by the use of incense at these moments, Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter have written of a blurring of biblical time that might perhaps be compared with the passing of the pageant wagons in York at the feast of Corpus Christi: 'incense,' they write,

coaxed a series of complex associations as it billowed up from the thurible [...]. It might have reminded parishioners of the incense brought from the East by the Magi, and possibly of the angel in Revelation (Rev. 8:3–8) who, through incense, wrought thunder, lightning, and earthquakes.<sup>91</sup>

Dugan notes a more worldly connection: 'Produced from spices originating in the Holy Land and native botanicals,' she writes, 'medieval religious scents represented a myriad of geographic, political, and economic networks. The exotic, the profane, and holy all were invoked by scented incense and balm'.<sup>92</sup> Incense, then, was frequently used in the late medieval drama, and its appeal would appear to have resided in its capacity to heighten moments of devotional intensity and to blur otherwise fixed temporal and geographical boundaries by virtue of its mesmerizing smell.

<sup>90</sup> *Chester Play* 6, lines 651–666.

<sup>91</sup> Heffernan T.J. – Matter E.A., "Introduction to the Liturgy of the Medieval Church", in Heffernan T.J. – Matter E.A. (eds.), *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: 2005) 1–10, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Dugan H., "Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008) 229–252, 234.



The foregoing citations help to contextualize the theatrical potential of the references to herbs, spices, flowers and incense that are scattered throughout the York play-text.

- 1) In the York Prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge (Play 4), God draws the attention of Adam and Eve to the herbs and spices growing in the Garden of Paradise:

Adam and Eve, this is the place  
That I have graunte you of my grace  
To have your wonnyng in.  
Erbes, spyce, frute on tree,  
Beastes, fewles, all that ye see  
Shall bowe to you, more and myn.<sup>93</sup>

- 2) The gift of incense is referred to in the York Play of Herod Questioning the Three Kings and the Offering of the Magi (Play 16). Here it is equated with the power of judgement.

And sythyn thow shall sitte to be demand,  
To helle or to heven for to have us,  
Insens to thi servis is semand.  
Sone, se to thi suggettis and save us.<sup>94</sup>

- 3) In the Entry into Jerusalem (Play 25), we find a citizen of the town making a suggestion similar to that found in the N-Town play-text, accompanied by a reference to a crowd of singing children (in the N-Town text, as we saw, it is the singing children who are instructed to strew flowers before Christ's entry):

Go we than with processiou  
To mete that comely [gracious one] as us awe [ought]  
With braunches, floures, and unysoune [= singing],  
With myghtfull songes her [here] on a rawe.  
Our childir schall  
Go synge before that men may knawe.<sup>95</sup>

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93 *York Play* 4, lines 1–6.

94 *York Play* 16, lines 329–32.

95 *York Play* 25, lines 260–265.

In the same play, Christ is greeted by one of the Jerusalem citizens as a sweet smelling flower:

Hayll, florisschand floure that nevere shall fade,  
Hayll, vyolett vernand [blooming] with swete odoure [...].<sup>96</sup>

While a specific stage direction of the kind cited from the N-Town Entry into Jerusalem is missing here, the report of the Entry delivered by Bedellus in the York play of the First Trial by Pilate (Play 30) indicates the likelihood that flowers were strewn on or from the pageant wagon at this moment:

Als a God in that grounde thai hym grette [greeted],  
Wele semand hym in waye with worschippe lele.  
*Osanna* thei sange, 'the sone of David,'  
Riche men with thare robes, thei ranne to his fete,  
And poure folke fecched floures of the frith [forest]  
And made myrthe and melody this man for to mete.<sup>97</sup>

- 4) The York play-text includes several references to the sweet smell associated with the Virgin. In the Purification of the Virgin (Play 17), Symeon praises Mary in terms that underline her sweet fragrance:

Haill floscampy [flower of the field] and flower vyrgynall,  
The odour of thy goodnes reflars [rises up] to us all;  
Haill, moost happy to great and to small  
For our weyll [prosperity].  
Haill ryall roose, moost ruddy of hewe,  
Haill flour unfadyng, both freshe ay and newe,  
Haill the kyndest in comforth that ever man knewe  
For grete heyll [health].<sup>98</sup>

In the Assumption of the Virgin (Play 45), various angels call out to Mary to rise to their ranks, calling her by the names of flowers and emphasising the sweet fragrance associated with her:

96 *York Play* 25, lines 496–497.

97 *York Play* 30, lines 341–346.

98 *York Play* 17, lines 366–373.

II Angelus: Rise, lilly ful lusty, thi luffe is full likand.

IV Angelus: Rise, rose ripe redolent, in reste to be reynand.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, we might register that it is the spicers who produced the play of the Annunciation to Mary and the Visitation at York (Play 12). In her study of food in medieval drama, Ann Rycraft maintains that the allocation to the spicers of this play cannot be considered appropriate to the guild concerned.<sup>100</sup> But it should now be clear that this guild was especially well placed to provide the props required to bring forth the rich aromatic scent associated with Mary and thus to realize the commonplace assertions of the Virgin's sweet fragrance.

### Conclusion

Several of the references to the senses listed above appear to be largely conventional, such as the comparison of the Virgin to roses and lilies. But our catalogue of olfactory moments in the English cycle plays suggests that these references to olfaction were also apt to be elaborated upon in performance. At York, as elsewhere, these were commonplaces that were suggestive of sensory experiences, perhaps acting as olfactory triggers, prompting a memory of a particular smell; they might on occasion have been made real. In the absence of the unusually detailed stage directions given in manuscripts such as the N-Town book, we contend that particularly close attention must be paid to what can be gleaned regarding the horizon of audience expectations. Certainly, the contextualizing evidence we have advanced does not allow us to make any positivist claims about the performance history of the York Play. By concentrating on York's affinities with contemporary ideas about sense perception and with analogous visual and dramatic productions, we hope, however, that we have been able to go some way towards clarifying the manner in which the Play's gestures towards smell might have engaged its participants.

Recent scholarship in theatre studies has turned to phenomenology in an attempt to explore the audience's corporeal and sensual experience of performance. An approach which acknowledges what Simon Shepherd has called the effects 'felt in the body' but 'bypassing the intellect' seems to be particularly

99 *York Play* 45, lines 106 and 108.

100 Rycraft A., "Food in Medieval Drama", in Walker H. (ed.), *Food in the Arts: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1998* (Blackawton: 1999) 164–172, 165.

productive for the study of medieval theatre if we consider it in the context of affective piety.<sup>101</sup> Affective piety depended on the emotional and sensual response to biblical events, on compassion that enabled the devotee to participate in the holy narrative and to relive its joys and pains in emotional and physical terms. Medieval theatre as a multi-sensory medium was particularly well suited to generate such a response. Watching the biblical events unfold on stage, listening to heavenly music, and – not least – smelling the sweet fragrance of the Virgin Mary offered the sensual and physical encounter with the sacred which many devotees yearned for. Olfactory elements would have helped to suspend the temporal and spatial barrier between the audience and the staged gospel events. ‘Smell,’ as Barbara Baert has recently argued, ‘bridges different times and realities’.<sup>102</sup>

Devotional practice which involved the feeding and stimulation of the senses was, as we have seen, railed against by the author of the *Treatise of Miraculis Pleyinge*. The anxieties voiced in this text were amplified during the Reformation, but attempts to restrict olfactory access to the divine apparently met with resistance. In 1544, the traditionalist Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, complained that the reformers of the Church cared only to access worshippers through their ears, through oral preaching, neglecting to appeal to their other senses: ‘they speak so myche of prechynge, so as all the gates of our sences and wayes to mannis understandynge shuld be shit up, savyng the eare alone’ –<sup>103</sup> a reaction which, one might imagine, was shared by some of the citizens of York after the banning of their play in the mid-sixteenth century. It is emblematic of the ephemeral nature of smell and the difficulties facing scholars interested in the history of its uses that a piece of evidence adumbrating the past fragrance of medieval worship such as this registers not the presence of an olfactory element but its past presence: its absence.

101 Shepherd S., *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (Abingdon: 2006) 36–37.

102 Baert B., “‘An Odour. A Taste. A Touch. Impossible to Describe’: *Noli Me Tangere* and the Senses”, in Boer W. de – Göttler C. (eds.), *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: 2013) 111–151, 140.

103 Gardiner Stephen, *Gardiner’s Lost Tract against William Turner*, in Muller J.A. (ed.), *The Letters of Stephen Gardiner* (Cambridge: 1933) 480–492, 485. See further Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: 2011) 1.

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## The Sensory Body in Shakespeare's Theatres

*Farah Karim-Cooper*

Whosoever shall visit the chapel of Satan, I mean the theater, shall find there no want of young ruffians, nor lack of harlots, utterly past all shame, who press to the forefront of the scaffolds, to the end to show their impudency and to be as an object to all men's eyes. Yea, such is their open shameless behaviour, as every man may perceive by their wanton gestures, whereunto they are given: yea, they seem there to be like brothels of the stews.<sup>1</sup>

The body's vulnerability to theatrical performance in London's playhouses is nowhere registered more vividly than in the anti-theatrical diatribes that burst on to the scene in the 1570s, 80s and 90s. Although we should not place too much emphasis upon anti-theatrical tracts as concrete evidence of performance or playgoing practices, passages like the one cited above nevertheless reveal the ways in which theatre was viewed as a multi-sensory experience. Munday draws attention not only to the self-conscious visibility of the audience, but also to the experience of tactility that can be felt in those theatre spaces. He suggests that the senses are explicitly engaged and riveted in such a public forum. The implication in the majority of these diatribes, then, is that the early modern body in the playhouse is vulnerable, due to the receptive quality of sense perception. The theatre, conceivably, was a wild and complex sensorium where the presentation of drama seemed to have the capacity to infect or affect its spectators, potentially producing changes in their humoral constitution, their emotional states and even their behaviour.

As Matthew Milner has shown, pre-Reformation religious worship was viewed as 'excessively sensual because its images, incense, candles, vestments, music, and, above all, its Eucharistic doctrine were used to protect, transform and condition churchgoers through sensible religious experiences'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, scholars like Jonas Barish have long acknowledged that the anti-theatrical prejudice in post-Reformation England articulated an abhorrence of

1 Munday Antony, *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters*, in *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. T. Pollard (Oxford: 2004) 62–83; 75.

2 Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: 2011) 3.

theatrical performance because of its similarities to the rituals, props and trappings of Catholic worship;<sup>3</sup> and, I would add, because of its analogous emphasis on the sensory and sensualized body. The anti-theatrical discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is colourful and loud with the language of the senses, evoking a range of synaesthetic metaphors to convey the provocative dangers that performance posed to the soul through the conduiting body.

In 1582 Stephen Gosson suggested that the devil himself was implicit in theatrical effects. For him, the very act of 'seeing' plays was sinful and an irresponsible deployment of the sense of sight. He further condemns what he calls 'the sweet numbers of poetry flowing in verse', which do 'wonderfully tickle the hearers' ears'. So the sense of hearing is vulnerable and too receptive to the ticklish verses of early modern drama. Gosson goes on to lament that these plays are

so set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles [...] with phrases so picked, so pure, so proper; with action so smooth, so lively, so wanton, that the poison creeping on secretly without grief, chokes us at last, and hurleth us down in a dead sleep.<sup>4</sup>

There is a curious commingling of sensory experience here. Spoken words are imagined as sweet-meats. In this synaesthetic image, words can be felt while being heard and while being heard, they can be tasted. Indeed, as Kathrin Scheuchzer shows in her chapter in this volume, the word of God in religious discourse is represented through the same language of synaesthesia. The ear canal and the tongue fuse together in Gosson's imagination, which characterizes theatrical spectatorship as a form of sensual gluttony. In such a scenario, the early modern playgoer might leave the playhouse bloated and windy with images and words.

The sense that is most commonly evoked in the moralist discourse against the commercial amphitheatres is the sense of touch. Elsewhere I have shown how the overwhelming effect, literally and metaphorically, of outdoor performance is a tactile one.<sup>5</sup> These writers repeatedly describe dramatic verse as

3 See Barish J., *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles: 1985).

4 Gosson Stephen, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, in *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. T. Pollard (Oxford: 2004) 84–114; 100.

5 See Karim-Cooper F., "Touch and Taste in Shakespeare's Theatres", in Karim-Cooper F. – Stern T. (eds.), *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance* (London: 2013) 214–236.

striking, pricking, tickling, poking, touching the ear, eye, skin and even the soul of the spectator or auditor in such a way as to implicate the sense of touch as the very basis of the early modern theatrical encounter. Language perpetrates the touching, but so do sound effects, music, colourful painted architecture and the sight of lavishly costumed actors, boys bewigged, painted with cosmetics and dressed up as women. In this chapter, I consider the ways in which the sense of touch underpins performance and its reception in the early modern playhouse. I will explore what might happen when the sensory body comes into contact with the theatres and to suggest that plays there are touching and touchable.

### Touch in the Amphitheatres of Early Modern London

Within the received hierarchy of the senses (a classical paradigm appropriated during the medieval period within a Christian framework), touch is almost always at the bottom. Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle has observed the theological tradition of demonizing the touching hand of Eve, thus reminding us that in early narratives of the Fall, it is sometimes suggested that 'it would have been better' if Eve had had no hands at all. Equally, according to Boyle, post-lapsarian 'art consistently depicted the primordial fault as touching, rather than tasting, the fruit'.<sup>6</sup> Within such a framework, touch indicates 'will', since 'only humans can grasp' with intention and this is why discussions of this sense are replete with anxious prescriptions for regulating the sensory body. Milner points out the sensuous distinction between Catholic and Protestant worship and how it shaped early modern belief systems. While reformers lashed out against the hyper-sensual rituals of the Catholic Church, Milner suggests, 'despite all of the wrangling and charges of sensuality, the fundamentals of traditional medieval sensory culture did not change over the course of the sixteenth century in England. If anything', Milner argues, 'they intensified'. He goes on to say:

Fear of the idolatrous was contingent on the same belief that gave shape to traditional sacramentality – the notion that sensation did something physical and real to the perceiver. Regardless of their religious differences, for both reformers and their opponents the sensible experience

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6 Boyle M. O'Rourke, *Senses of Touch: Human Dignity and Deformity from Michelangelo to Calvin*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions (Leiden: 1998) 110.

of falsity or deception was evil and caused sin, while sensing true, godly objects was beneficial.<sup>7</sup>

Nowhere is this opposition to 'sensible experience' made clearer than in the moralistic diatribes against the commercial theatres in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Anxieties about touch in this period prevailed amongst moralists because, 'touch was [seen as] gross, the grossest sense, essentially material and even animalistic'.<sup>8</sup> But this fear was also intensified by a fear of disease transmission. The humoral body is conceptually a body unstable, unfixed, the skin, porous and permeable. Gail Kern Paster and, more recently, Nancy Selleck identify a model of bodily absorption that observed the external environment to be something that could literally penetrate or be taken into the body. In other words, 'what is outside the self not only influences but becomes self'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, early modern discussions of touch are steeped in anxieties about the unstable fluctuations of physical and spiritual health. These anxieties also permeated much of the medical literature of the period, specifically the texts which warned of the varying forms of disease transmission. In 1603, the pamphlet *A Treatise of the Plague* judged that '[c]ontagion is an eveil qualitie in the bodie, communicated unto another by touch'.<sup>10</sup> 'Intimately implicated in the transmission from body to body of material, supernatural and "evil qualities"', observes Margaret Healy, "'touch" was undoubtedly experienced as the most hazardous of the senses and was the source of considerable individual and collective anxiety'.<sup>11</sup>

Notably, the hand not only registered one's identity and stood for agency, but it was also a dangerous transmitter of disease. The hand was seen in the early modern period as a crucial emblem of communication, agency and identity. The physician John Bulwer in his *Chirologia or the Natvrall Langvage of the Hand* argues for its supremacy in human discourse and transaction.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, studies of touch, such as Elizabeth Harvey's collection *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (2003), Matthew Milner's *The Senses and the English Reformation* (2011) and Constance Classen's *The Book of Touch*

7 Milner, *Senses and the English Reformation* 4.

8 Boyle, *Senses of Touch* 147.

9 Selleck N., *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (London: 2008) 58.

10 Cited in Healy M., "Anxious and Fatal Contacts: Taming the Contagious Touch", in Harvey E. (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: 2003) 22–38; 22.

11 Healy, "Anxious and Fatal Contacts" 22.

12 Bulwer John, *Chirologia or the Natvrall Langvage of the Hand* (London, Tho. Harper: 1644).

(2005) have shown that as a porous organ, skin was able passively to receive touch;<sup>13</sup> both the hand and the skin feature in this period as sensual pathways to pain, death and, more terrifyingly, to damnation. Theories of transmission thus depended upon the interplay between the active and passive functions of touch: the actively touching hand transfers contagion to the receptively feeling body; or, within the ireful complex of anti-theatrical discourse, the theatrical performance is perceived to have the capacity to transfer spiritual contagion to the receptive sensibilities of the audience, manifesting in not only physical, but moral sickness.

In *Essaies vpon the Fiue Senses* (1620), Richard Brathwait anatomizes the senses; his academic exposition is consistently underlined by his moralizing precepts. He reinforces the point that the senses are indeed necessary gateways to knowledge and understanding, but insists that they must be put into action responsibly: 'Let my Taste be directed by Reason, and not by sence', he declares. Brathwait equates touch with the original sin (as do many writers of moral treatises and anatomies in this period), but curiously, he does not deny the sense an essential dignity, calling it the 'living Sence' and most 'vital faculty'. He recognizes the variety of functions and the plurality of meanings the sense could produce: verification (or determining the world through touch), emotional response, and lastly, what Brathwait refers to as 'lustfull satisfaction' – or desire. It is this last connotation that concerns the author the most: 'O how many fall by this sence of life, making it their sence of death?'<sup>14</sup> So Brathwait cautions: although touch is a dignifying sense, it can be abused because of its links to bodily appetite.

There were others who reasoned that humans were noble because they had tactile powers. Early modern anatomists, as Elizabeth Harvey points out, ruled that touch was essential to their somatic discoveries. Discussing the copious treatise, *Microcosmographia* (1615) by Helkiah Crooke, Harvey argues that Crooke is 'one of the most eloquent defenders and articulate explicators of the complex early modern sense of tactility'.<sup>15</sup> After a re-evaluation of Vesalius's well-known self-portraits in *De Fabrica*, Harvey goes on to insist that 'early modern anatomy involves not only peeling away the body's outward sensory covering in order to discover visually the body's inside but also subduing and

13 Classen C. (ed.), *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: 2005).

14 Brathwait Richard, *Essaies vpon the Fiue Senses* (London, E.G. for Richard Whittaker: 1620) 49, 27, 30–31.

15 Harvey E., "The Touching Organ: Allegory, Anatomy, and the Renaissance Skin Envelope", in Harvey E. (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: 2003) 81–102; 81.

harnessing tactility and displacing its distracting sensuality into the mastering agency of the hand'.<sup>16</sup> Medical science and the technologies of dissection, then, enabled a privileging of tactility that opposed the moralistic vilification of the sense of touch. Crooke's treatise stages a debate about the senses, but asserts that 'touch fundamentally shapes human experience'.<sup>17</sup>

Touch has also been discussed as the most elusive of the senses, the unrepresented and unrepresentable sense, and there is no single organ through which touch can be experienced. Carla Mazzio argues: 'Whereas eyes, ears, nose, and tongue symbolize the modes of sensory perception they enable, touch is more difficult to represent, localize, and demonstrate'.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, Susan Stewart points out,

we do not see our eyes when we see or hear our ears when we hear, but tactile perception involves perception of our own bodily state as we take in what is outside that state. The pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as on objects. Although the hand is paramount, no particular organ is exclusively associated with touch; rather the entire surface of the body is touch's instrument.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of tactility producing a state of subjectivity as well as objectivity returns us to the receptive body of the early modern audience member, who is vulnerable to the haptic forces of drama, to its sights, sounds and smells. This model of hapticity is alluded to by Sir John Davies in *Nosce Teipsum* ("Of Humane Knowledge", 1599): 'So in th' Ear's *Labyrinth* the Voice doth stray, / And doth with *easy Motion* touch the Brain'.<sup>20</sup> Davies describes a voice penetrating ears and migrating into the body through a complex physiological process; effectively and 'with *easy Motion*', the disembodied voice seems literally to touch the brain. Davies exaggerates the haptic quality of sound, while he implies that the ear consumes sound passively, enabling entrance through to the auditory centre of the brain. There is an imagined material exchange here between the receiving body and the active touch of the voice. In *Gallatea*, John Lyly has

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16 Harvey, "The Touching Organ" 83.

17 Harvey, "The Touching Organ" 83.

18 Mazzio C., "The Senses Divided: Organs, Objects, and Media in Early Modern England", in Howes D. (ed.), *The Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford – New York: 2005) 85–105; 88.

19 Stewart S., *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: 2002) 162.

20 Davies John, *Nosce Teipsum: This oracle expounded in two elegies*, ed. N. Tate, 3rd ed. (London, William Mears – Jonas Browne: 1715) 70.



Cupid, who is furious at his advances being rejected by Diana, take revenge by causing the nymphs (vowed to be chaste) to fall in love. In constructing this element of the plot, Lyly attributes sensory organs to thoughts and hearts to describe the intrusion of love into the body: Love 'maketh thoughts have eyes, and hearts ears', suggesting the receptivity of the body to love's advances.<sup>21</sup> Thus aural phenomena are seen to produce intense emotions and thoughts, including the effect of love. In 5.1 of *The Merchant of Venice*, when Jessica and Lorenzo discuss the music of the spheres, we are given a synaesthetic picture of music's tactile function; this image beautifully demonstrates Shakespeare's sense of the palpable permeability of love into multiple senses:

Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
 Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
 Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
 [...]
 *[Enter Musicians]*  
 Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn!  
 With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,  
 And draw her home with music.<sup>22</sup>

Here the tactile phenomenon is music and the lovers are framed as passive vehicles into which the 'touches' of music 'creep in' through the ears. According to Renaissance theorist Thomas Wright, the effect – the stirring of their passions – occurs primarily through sensation. '[T]ouches' refers to the sound of music, but it also denotes the fingers of the musicians strumming their instruments.

In Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, Celia asks him to save her honour, appealing to his sensual capacity to be moved by her story: 'If you have ears that will be pierced – or eyes / That can be opened – a heart may be touched'.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in the early modern theatre one could be touched cognitively and emotionally through the ears, eyes, skin, nose and mouth. Of all the senses, touch is more commonly associated with the stirring of passion as a physical phenomenon; this is a linguistic association and underpins the early modern belief that emotions were convulsions that occurred in the feeling body, as Thomas Wright says

21 Lyly John, *Gallathea*, ed. L. Scragg (Manchester: 1997) act 1, scene 2, lines 19–20.

22 Shakespeare William, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. J.R. Brown, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. R. Proudfoot – A. Thompson – D.S. Kastan (London: 1998) act 5, scene 1, lines 55–68.

23 Jonson Ben, *Volpone*, in *Ben Jonson: The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. G. Campbell (Oxford: 1995) act 3, scene 7, lines 240–242.

in 1601: 'The motions of the soule [...] some Latines, as Cicero, called them perturbations, others affections, others affects, others more expressly name them passions'.<sup>24</sup> The very idea that the sense provided some kind of portal to the inner parts of the body, in particular, the soul, was linked to the humoral theory of bodily absorption. Anti-theatrical writers were collectively nervous about this innate quality of the body, which made it all the more susceptible to the dangers posed by performance. Theatrical performance was, in this discourse, able to damage moral principles and erase religious piety. Antony Munday again: 'There cometh much evil in the eares, but more at the eies, by these two windows death breaketh into the soule'.<sup>25</sup> The soul can be touched, stained and damned. John Northbrooke shares Munday's concern about the capability of performance to move into the body:

All such spectacles and shewes [...] are therefore to be avoided, not only because vices shall not enter our hearts and breasts, but also least the custom of pleasure should touch us, and convert us thereby both from God and good works.<sup>26</sup>

Elizabeth Harvey argues that the sense of touch for most early moderns had a double quality; although usually 'associated with the surface of the body, it becomes a metaphor for conveyance into the interior of the subject, particularly the capacity to arouse emotion (registered in the figurative sense of "touching" as kindling affect)' and to change the condition of souls.<sup>27</sup> Munday highlights this when he reports of

[s]ome citizens' wives, upon whom the Lord for example to others hath laid his hands, have even on their death beds with tears confessed that they have received at those spectacles such filthy infections as have turned their minds from chaste cogitations, and made them of honest women light housewives; by them they have dishonored the vessels of holiness, and brought their husbands into contempt, their children into question, their bodies into sickness, and their souls to the state of everlasting damnation.<sup>28</sup>

24 Wright Thomas, *The Passions of the Minde* (London, v.s. for W.B.: 1601) 13.

25 Munday, *A Second and Third Blast* 76.

26 Northbrooke John, *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes with other Idle Pastimes* (London: 1577) 62.

27 Harvey, "The Sense of all Senses" 2.

28 Munday, *A Second and Third Blast* 70.

Stephen Gosson argues that plays 'by the privie entries of the eare, slip down into the hart, & with gunshotte of affection gaule the minde'.<sup>29</sup> Thus the emotional and physiological effects of theatrical performance are repeatedly figured forth in tactile terms; the seeing and hearing of plays frequently characterized as synaesthetic exercises with physical, moral and behavioural consequences.

But how do the early modern theatres offer an alternative sensory environment to modern theatres? What can a consideration of the performance of Shakespearean drama in such spaces bring to light about the sensory ideology of early modern England that perhaps reading the plays alone cannot? And to what extent can we harness our own multi-sensoriality, so focused as we are on seeing and hearing when we attend theatre now?

### The Playhouses

As microcosm, the Elizabethan amphitheatres reflected the universe in mini, the performance of drama there enabling spectators to contemplate their own places within it. As Kent T. van den Berg has shown, as 'heterocosm', these theatres were like the spherical, terrestrial globes – separate worlds in relation to which one could position oneself objectively.<sup>30</sup> The amphitheatres were open air, vertical structures constructed with timber, lime plaster and thatch with a brick foundation. This multi-textural quality is established by these basic material constituents, which also provide the theatre with its unique visual field, olfactory, tactile and sound scapes. These organic materials are vastly different from the steel and concrete with which modern theatres are constructed. Bruce Smith has described famously the acoustic effects of these materials, by imagining the Globe as a human vocal system:

In its tubular shape it approximated the shape of the human vocal tract. [...] The vibrator was the stage. The propagator was the architectural surround. In the production of 'theatrical' sound, the building itself functions as the larynx, mouth and sinuses do in the production of purely vocal sound [...]. The primary materials out of which the Globe was constructed [...] all return to the ambient air a high percentage of the sound waves that strike them. [...] The result of these reflections from wood

29 Gosson Stephen, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London, Thomas Woodcocke: 1579) sig. B7r.

30 See Berg K.T. van den, *Playhouse and Cosmos: Shakespearean Theater as Metaphor* (Newark: 1985) 26.

and plaster within the wooden O is a plenitude of what acoustical science calls 'standing waves' – stationary patterns of vibration formed by many reflected sound waves, coming from many different surfaces [...]. Auditors experience these steady waves of energy as full, present sound, uniform throughout the listening space.<sup>31</sup>

What the early modern anti-theatricalists feared as sound penetrating the body through tactile sensation is, in our modern understanding, equivalent to the reflective sound waves being absorbed by the human body. Smith tells us that 'within the acoustic environment of the Globe there were only three highly sound-absorbant materials: the arras, the surface of the yard, and human bodies'.<sup>32</sup> The human body as a porous, sensorially absorbant surface is a given in the early modern theory of perception. As Brathwait anxiously puts it:

the fiue gates, by which the world doth besiege vs, the Deuil doth tempt vs, and the flesh ensnare vs; yet in euery one of these, if rightly employed, is there a peculiar good and benefit redounding to the comfort of the soule, no lesse than to the auaile and vtility of the bodie.<sup>33</sup>

In the early modern theatre, the surface of the body absorbs but also pushes back against the sensual pressures on the eyes and ears, which formed meaningful exchanges between performer and audience in the playhouse and, in large part, the exchanges between performance and audience were the very currency upon which the theatre industry thrived. 'The acoustics' of these amphitheatres, observes Smith, 'reflected back to audiences the sound of themselves'.<sup>34</sup>

An example of such an acoustical exchange would be audience laughter, which is said to have been so loud that it was able to make the 'hairs stand upon the back' of the neck. Accounts of audience laughter in the period have conveyed 'astonishment at the sheer decibel level produced by an audience roaring [...] in a full theatre'.<sup>35</sup> Matthew Steggle's study of laughing and weeping in the early modern playhouses discusses *The Careless Shepherdess* (1638), which dramatizes two characters' discussion of seeing a play; one describes

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31 Smith B.R., *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (London – Chicago: 1999) 208–209.

32 Smith, *The Acoustic World* 214.

33 Brathwait, *Essaies vpon the Fiue Senses* 57.

34 Smith, *The Acoustic World* 214.

35 Steggle M., *Laughing and Weeping in the Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: 2007) 68.

how upon seeing the clown poke his head through the curtain, “ravishing joy enter’d into my heart”.<sup>36</sup> The emotional effect of this comic and commonly used theatrical device is described in similar terms, though more positively here, as those of the anti-theatrical writers. By equal measure, tears or weeping, according to Steggle, can be produced through the same dramatic process. Gosson resents the fact that audiences could cry at plays – seeing it as another unruly bodily response: ‘If the body onely were at this expence, but our soules will accompany them, and bee so foolishely kinde, as to lament for what they never knew’.<sup>37</sup> The same evils, then, that can induce laughter can also induce tears, and both responses were perceived to endanger the subject, who has given him or herself (body and soul) entirely over to a fiction that should, according to Gosson, not touch them at all. The production of audience response is a wholly sensory exchange, either way. Moreover, audience shouts and rapturous applause, either intermediate or post-performance, contributed to the cognitive and sensory dialogism of theatrical performance.

The anti-theatricalist William Prynne found applause particularly offensive because it violated the strict moral codes that dictated how hands should be deployed in public:

He who upon a Players or Play-Poets Plaudit, gives any public acclamation, any applause unto the Play, or Actors, approves both Play and Players, with all their sinful passages, speeches, gestures, and pernicious consequents, and saith AMEN unto them: a dangerous fearful sin [...]. [...] Applauses so pollute mens hands, that they can neither lift them up to God in prayer nor yet stretch them out to receive the Sacrament in an holy manner.<sup>38</sup>

The very act of clapping infects the hands with sin, disabling them from virtuous gestures, such as prayer and taking the sacrament. But applause attended playgoing even if it could be an alarming phenomenon for early moderns, who did not experience sounds louder than bells, cannons or thunder. Matthew Steggle has shown the ubiquity of references in the period to the loudness of applauding spectators, arguing that ‘at its loudest, early modern theater was an

36 Cited in Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping* 69.

37 Gosson Stephen, *Plays Confuted in Fiue Actions*, cited in Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping* 85.

38 Prynne William, *Histrio-Mastix, The Player's Scourge* (London, E.A. – W.I. for Michael Sparke: 1633) 298.

assault on the ears of its audiences'.<sup>39</sup> Depending on the force that is applied when applauding, it could be an assault on the hands as well – we all know that sensation of red, burning, itching palms when we have clapped vigorously to express passionate appreciation. The act of applauding is an act of touch as much as it is a producer of sound; it is a moment when the subject becomes the object as one hand makes somewhat violent contact with the other. Applause helps to melt the boundaries between subject and object; this occurs in the playhouse individually and collectively, between performer and spectator, within a community of spectators and within the spectating subject him or herself.

To return now to the physical anatomy of the playhouse, the stage thrusts out into an open yard exposed to the elements and is attached to what is sometimes called the tiring-house wall. There are three levels of galleries; the stage is protected by a large canopy known as 'the heavens'. This canopy is supported by two great oak pillars, painted to look like marble. The tiring-house wall or *frons scenae* provided the audience with a rich visual feast, denied to them in the churches of post-reformation England. The painted surfaces of these theatres provoked anti-theatrical writers to call them sumptuous, gorgeous, painted palaces or chapels/temples of Satan. Such an emphasis on painted spectacle may have simultaneously provoked religious nostalgia and anxiety. As Brathwait points out, 'there is no passage more easie for the entry of vice than by the crannie of the eye'.<sup>40</sup> The theatres would have been painted with a rich and readable iconography of classical motifs, celestial bodies, allegory, decorative cartouches and elaborate strap work.

Inside these spaces, while the ears are being tickled by verse and the sounds of laughter, applause, cannons, drums, clocks, screeching owls, thunder and other re-sounding effects, the eyes are feasting on rich, painted decoration, and bodies are pressed up against each other in the audience. Elsewhere, I have discussed the inter-audience contact, showing that the playhouses no larger than 92 feet in diameter would sometimes be crammed full with 3,000 spectators.<sup>41</sup> This crushing congregating produced a physical contact that was at once provocative, dynamic and disturbing. This kind of touching would perhaps be taken for granted, but, in an age where Health and Safety issues prevent modern reconstructed playhouses from overcrowding their venues, it is

39 Steggle M., "Notes towards and Analysis of Early Modern Applause", in Craik K. – Pollard T. (eds.), *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2013) 125.

40 Brathwait, *Essaies vpon the Fiue Senses* 3.

41 See "Touch and Taste in Shakespeare's Theatres" 218.

worth considering the added sensory pressures that might inform reception of Shakespearean drama in the amphitheatres of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

To conclude this chapter, I want to pause to consider how the tactile basis, whether literal or metaphorical, for the early modern theatrical encounter might have some currency when thinking about reception in a reconstructed early modern theatre, such as the Globe in London (re-built as a close approximation to the 1599 Bankside Globe). I will use as a case study a production of *Titus Andronicus* staged at the new Globe in 2006 and then revived in 2014.

### *Titus Andronicus* at the Globe

As Carla Mazzio writes, '[w]ords touch skin, blood and bone, and enter the bodily interior as a kind of liquid physiology, altering the substance of the heart and mind'.<sup>42</sup> Not always sitting at the base of the hierarchy of the senses, touch and the importance given to it are registered in the metaphorical vocabulary of emotion, which is why Aristotle identified the tactile senses as the most inward of the senses and the sense that was the most unmediated.<sup>43</sup> But what would it mean to be denied the sense of active touch, which can be identified here as deliberate, self-motivated touch: claspings, grasping, writing, dressing, holding, grabbing with the hands. Passive touching is the category of touch that, as I have shown, suggests that the body was vulnerable to physical as well as meta-physical entities. The interplay between passive and active touching becomes more focused and intensified when we witness in *Titus Andronicus* the horrible mutilation of Lavinia. But rather than focus on the sense of touch in the play as a thematic device or sensory motif, I want to consider how witnessing this tragedy now in the unique sense-scape of the reconstructed Globe might affect a modern audience and to what extent the anti-theatrical vocabulary of tactility might literally attend such a performance.

When Marcus Andronicus presents the mutilated body of his niece to Titus, he remarks: 'This was thy daughter'.<sup>44</sup> Marcus's insinuation is that Lavinia is as good as dead, due to her ravaged condition and because she is unable to

42 Mazzio C., "Acting with Tact: Touch and Theater in the Renaissance", in Harvey E. (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: 2003) 159–186; 178.

43 See Aristotle, *De Anima* (11.ii.423b), trans. H. Lawson-Tangred (London: 1986).

44 Shakespeare William, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. J. Bate, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. R. Proudfoot – A. Thompson – D.S. Kastan (London: 1998) act 3, scene 1, line 63.



communicate through her vital senses. She is presented as a body in crisis, in fragments, having lost the parts of her that, according to early modern hand theory, were the markers of identity and agency; she is seen as merely a passive memorial of the violating touches of her rapists. Bridget Escolme invites us to consider how it might be possible to 'compare the emotional responses of early modern and current audiences'.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps thinking through early modern sense theory and the ideas about how reception may have influenced responses can be done in parallel with a consideration of our own sets of ideas about the ways in which the senses mediate, shape and develop our own reception of performance. There are odd continuities between the anxieties expressed in anti-theatrical literature about the material effects of performance on the body and how audiences have responded in the reconstructed Globe to the performance of violent spectacle.

Veena Das asks:

How is it that we can find references to courage, sacrifice, heroism, cowardice, despair, grief, angst, anger, suffocation, laughter, parody, longing, love, hate, disgust, horror, fear, pain, suffering – in fact, every conceivable emotion or disposition – as part of the experience of violence?<sup>46</sup>

Evidently, witnessing violence provokes a range of affective responses in an early modern as well as a modern audience. In the playhouse, the sight of Lavinia's bleeding stumps and mouth presents a problem for audiences – if we think of sights in early modern sensory terms, they enter into the eyes and pierce the heart, provoking fear, pity, terror, perhaps, which would lead to physical symptoms such as nausea, dizziness or weakness in the limbs. Performance in Shakespeare's playhouse is dependent upon the implausibility of illusion, suggesting that audiences have to cognitively participate in the illusion even while they see it is theatrical trick. The term 'illusion' is derived from the Latin for 'play': 'ludo, ludere'. The prefix 'il' suggests 'through' or 'into', as in 'illustrate' or 'illuminate'.<sup>47</sup> The etymological origins of the term are fundamentally sensory, tactile and speak to the ways in which anti-theatricalists

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45 Escolme B., *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (London: 2014) xxxiv.

46 Das V., "Violence, Gender and Subjectivity", *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008) 283–299; 284.

47 Woods P., *Globe Audiences: Spectatorship and Reconstruction at Shakespeare's Globe*, Ph.D. dissertation, (Queen Mary University of London: 2012).

perceived the material and non-material constituents of performance as invasive phenomena.

In the 2006 Globe Season production of *Titus Andronicus*, directed by Lucy Bailey, the colourful, often distracting painted iconography was concealed by black hangings in order to foreground the traumatized bodies on stage. Recent reviews of the 2014 production commented that the production is almost 'unwatchable' and reported that 'two people fainted and more had to be taken out to recover';

several of the groundlings – the audience who stand in the central pit of the open-air auditorium – gasped and fell to the floor when Flora Spencer-Longhurst, as Lavinia, walked on stage covered in blood after she had been raped and her tongue and hands cut off.<sup>48</sup>

Lavinia's ravaged condition was staged with realistic stage blood, using blood capsules in her mouth and heavily doused bandages upon her 'stumps'. Designer Bill Dudley had chosen to evoke the ancient Roman amphitheatres that deployed awnings designed to protect audiences from rain or extreme heat. Thus a temporary velarium was placed upon the Globe's O. The production made use of other effects, such as music, smoke and incense to harness what we may now perceive to be an 'appropriate' atmosphere for tragedy and violence. Through the performance runs in 2006 and 2014, the Globe witnessed people crying or needing to be escorted out of the playhouse; there were a few instances of vomiting, a lot of fainting amongst those standing in the yard as well as those sitting in the galleries. In her research on audience at Shakespeare's Globe, Penelope Woods found that fainting occurs under certain conditions: warm weather, low oxygen and bloody spectacle. But why? Why is there such an extremity in the physiological responses of audience members? Does it have to do with the unique sense-scape that the architecture of an Elizabethan amphitheatre creates? Penelope Woods argues that 'while the actions on stage are simulated [created through complex theatrical illusion], the feelings produced in spectators are "real", and yet, the real feelings may be different to the "real" feelings we might experience' if we were in a situation in

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48 Dubuis A., "Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* Proves Too Much for Globe Crowd as Audience Members Faint During 'Grotesquely Violent' Scenes", *London Evening Standard*, 02 May 2014 <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/shakespeares-titus-andronicus-proves-too-much-for-globe-crowd-as-audience-members-faint-during-grotesquely-violent-scenes-9315422.html> (accessed 4 May 2014).

which [we actually witnessed] someone so violently mutilated.<sup>49</sup> What anti-theatrical writers and others witnessed when they observed their contemporaries at a play was real, their vocabulary of sensory intrusion expressing the tangible, phenomenological exchange between drama, playhouse, actor and the sense-full attendant bodies of the audience.

To take plays into the body was as painful or as pleasurable then as it is now. In theatre history studies, there is a common argument that people in Shakespeare's day went to 'hear' a play. But I would challenge this view by suggesting that Shakespeare's first audiences went to see, smell, taste and touch them as well, sometimes through individual organs of perception and sometimes synaesthetically. While sensory fusion was the mode through which performance was negotiated, I would argue that the experience of playgoing was seen as fundamentally and metaphorically a tactile experience. The provocative danger plays posed for the anti-theatrical writers depended on a system of thought that maintained the interior of the body was vulnerable due to its sensing/over-sensitive, absorbent surface. The response to a production like *Titus Andronicus* at the new Globe Theatre suggests that our sensory bodies are still susceptible to the affective power of theatre.

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# Afterword: From Gateways to Channels. Reaching towards an Understanding of the Transformative Plasticity of the Senses in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods

*Elizabeth Robertson*

The ninth-century Fuller Brooch with which Annette Kern-Stähler and Kathrin Scheuchzer begin this collection provides a snapshot of early medieval ideas about the senses. Sight, as it so often does in images influenced by Augustinian neo-platonic thought, is represented by a frontal image of a person with enlarged eyes who looks out at the viewer from the centre of the circular brooch. Circling that central figure are four additional ones, whose association with a given sense is indicated by hand gestures: hearing is conveyed by a figure who holds a hand to its ear; taste, by one who brings its hand to its mouth; smell, by the prominence given to the nose when the figure puts its hands behind its back; and touch by one who clasps its hands together. That the hand is given so much prominence in the images on the brooch foregrounds the essential aspect of the senses that medieval and early modern representations of the senses repeatedly engage: the senses extend the reach beyond the boundaries of the self. Sensual apprehension always then involves some sort of encounter of the self with something other than the self or even with the self as other and the processes by which a being experiences such an encounter are always to some extent obscure. The twelve essays of this volume probe the complexity of medieval and early modern understandings of the senses and offer fruitful avenues for further investigation.

As we see in a number of these essays, including Dieter Bitterli's, Javier E. Díaz-Vera's and Katherine Hindley's, the vocabulary of the past in itself conveys the complexity of medieval and early modern understandings of the senses. The vocabulary used for sight and touch and their organs and/or mediums are particularly varied and sometimes these words intertwine the two senses. For example, the Anglo-Saxon word *beheoldan* draws on the semantic field of touch to convey the activity involved in seeing. Words signifying seeing can refer both to a physical action and a mental one; as Christian Kay (cited in Hindley's essay), points out, 'many words transfer from a meaning of physical vision to one of mental vision. These include *behealdan*, *locian*, *sceawian*, *beseon*, all with the literal meaning *to look at, gaze*, and a metaphorical one of

*observe, regard, scrutinize*'. The word *touch*, derived from the French, does not enter the language until the fourteenth century. The Anglo-Saxon and Middle English word for touch is *gefelan*, to feel, a word that conflates a physical action with an interior affective state associated with it. The medium associated with touch, skin, appears as *hyd* or *fel* in Anglo-Saxon, words that convey covering or protection rather than the semi-permeability now associated with the skin. Occasionally it appears as *skyn*, a word derived from Old Norse, but this word is rarely used in the early periods except perhaps to distinguish the covering of a large animal (*skyn*) from that of a small one (*hyd*).

The nature of the medium of touch, skin, was explored by scribes and authors throughout the early periods in a variety of ways including in their contemplation of the writing surface upon which medieval scribes wrote – parchment – as a skin of a formerly living being (sheep, cow, calf). A striking example of an author/scribe's awareness of the signifying power of the semi-permeable membrane upon which he wrote is the *Charter of Christ* in MS Additional 37049, in which we find a figure of a bleeding Christ holding a charter over his lower body which promises salvation on the two conditions of love of neighbour and love of God.<sup>1</sup> The representation of the charter includes an image of a seal in the form of the wounded sacred heart. Christ's suffering is represented in red ink marks representing piercings on the body and the drops of red ink/blood oozing from the wounds in the side and hands of Christ appear to drip onto the charter itself. Clearly an exploration of the range of semantic meanings conveyed by the words employed to describe the senses, their organs, their mediums and the various ways scribes, authors and artists conveyed those meanings will deepen our understanding of the historical development of understandings of the senses.

Representations of the senses in written texts throughout these early periods present sensual apprehension as involving a dialectical negotiation between inner and outer. This dialectic was understood primarily through an Aristotelian model of the soul in which data gathered by the senses were understood as entering the soul through the outer senses, processed by the inner wits, and then further organized and judged by inner faculties ultimately under the control of reason. The faculties themselves were hierarchically arranged and such an arrangement, as Jens Martin Gurr argues, has profound political implications. Gurr's analysis supports Robert Jütte's more general observation that,

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1 Jessica Brantley discusses the Charter of Christ that appears in MS Additional 37049 in her *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: 2007).

the 'economy' of the senses is a mirror image of the society in question, meaning that in any given hierarchy or classification of the senses it is possible to discern mental outlines and reproductions of the social hierarchy and value system to which it is attached.<sup>2</sup>

Usually sight is at the top of the hierarchy, as it is in Wyclif's model of the senses, as Sean Otto points out, and smell is at the bottom, although sometimes touch, considered the most elusive of the senses, is granted the first rank.

Metaphors that appear frequently in medieval and early modern texts reflect another hierarchized notion of the senses in relationship to the other faculties of the soul including reason. In the Old English *Soliloquies*, as Hindley points out, the senses act as servants to the Lady Reason figured as a queen. In Middle English writings from the thirteenth-century *Sawles Warde* to the fourteenth-century *Piers Plowman*, this image is developed: the body is represented as a household or a castle within which the soul lies and where the senses are either guardians or servants of the house. In *Sawles Warde* the senses are unruly, are associated with the passions, are subject to Will rather than Reason and are in need of strict regulation and government. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as Gurr points out, the lower social orders are associated with the disorderly senses in need of Reason's firm control.

Medieval and early modern notions of what happens to the information that enters the structures that represent the soul, whether a household or a castle, depend primarily on Aristotelian conceptions of the structure of the interior of the soul. In the Aristotelian scheme, the soul consisted of two primary faculties, will and reason. The remainder of the faculties that made up the soul, given different names at different times, included the internal (often called imagination) and external senses and the appetitive aspects of the soul, that is, the concupiscible and irascible appetites (sometimes also described as will). The notion that there were five senses was developed very early and persisted for centuries. Indeed it is only in recent years that neuroscientists have identified well over fifty different senses, although how or what to count in enumerating the senses is controversial.<sup>3</sup> The five senses were understood to convey information to the soul which then, guided by reason and processed, would judge the sensory data. In some prominent medieval and early modern texts, sensory data was understood to enter the soul in the form of images and

2 Jütte R., *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. J. Lynn (Cambridge: 2005) 14.

3 See Rivlin R. – Gravelle K., *Deciphering the Senses: The Expanding World of Human Perception* (New York: 1984) 154.



the human being was understood to think in images, as V.A. Kolve explains in his influential 1984 book *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*.<sup>4</sup> In others, memory played a primary role as we have learned from Mary Carruthers' 1990 comprehensive study of monastic memory, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. In some periods the rational processes described in Aristotle and taken up by Aquinas become complicated by the reclamation of the equal and ineffable power of the will as discussed by the late medieval voluntarists and considered further in reformation thought.

Literary texts struggled to move beyond the fixed philosophical and theological categories of the Aristotelian model to create a more fluid and energetic model of the soul. The understanding of the role imagination plays in the formation of knowledge changes over time from the medieval period, in which imagination is seen to be a lower faculty, to the early modern period, in which imagination comes to be understood as a creative power. In the fourteenth-century *Piers Plowman*, for example, the character *Imagynatyf* is not quite the same as Aristotle's *imaginativa*, that relatively lower faculty of the soul that receives, divides and composes images. When subject to the higher faculty of reason, as Langland's character seems to be, imagination has the power to think through images. By the time of Shakespeare, imagination, as it is described by Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is granted the power to create 'something of great constancy, / But howsoever, strange and admirable'.<sup>5</sup>

Milton also grants to the faculty of imagination an active power, but he changes the name of imagination to Fancy, as we can see in the passage from *Paradise Lost* Jens Martin Gurr discusses:

But know that in the soul  
Are many lesser faculties that serve  
Reason as chief; among these fancy next  
Her office holds; of all external things,  
Which the five watchful senses represent,  
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,  
Which reason joining or disjoining, frames  
All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion [...].

4 Kolve V.A., *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, CA: 1984).

5 *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: 1974) v, i, 25–27.

The senses here represent 'imaginations' or images which reason joins, disjoins or frames. What is important to notice in this image is the active role of both fancy, who 'forms' imaginations, and reason, who 'joins, disjoins, and frames'. Knowledge acquisition here is far from passive. Fancy in this image plays an elevated role in processing sense data whereas in later years it comes to occupy a lower status compared to imagination as discussed in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* where imagination is granted the power to synthesize images. The history of the role the senses play in the development of ideas about imagination has yet to be fully explored.

When one of the senses is or indeed all of the senses are exaggerated in an individual, that individual becomes marked as extra-human, either as monstrous or divine. Bitterli describes the ways in which monstrous races were often represented in text and image as possessing especially acute perception in one sense. Grendel, for example, has particularly acute hearing and it is what he hears (the singing of a community) that drives him to violence. Beowulf's dragon has an exaggerated sense of smell. Exotic snakes of Hascellentia have an exaggerated sense of sight. Eyes may appear misplaced as they are in the headless Blemmyae, where the eyes are placed in the middle of the body. The Panotii who live east in the Red Sea have exceptionally large ears. In these images, as Bitterli points out, 'the five senses not only appear as codes of alterity, hybridity and both physical and oral aberration, but also serve as conduits of imagined contact and cultural encounter'. How the senses enable or resist cultural encounter deserves further investigation.

Acute sensual ability not only characterizes monsters but also is attributed, at least metaphorically, to God and to other divine beings such as Christ and the angels. As Tobias Gabel explains in his discussion of Milton, God is presented as if he possesses perfect sight, though that perfection is one of spiritual rather than physical sight. Unlike humans, God has simple, direct (unmediated) and total knowledge of all things in an eternal present; Milton represents God's total knowledge through metaphors of his perfect sight. The senses of human beings, in part because of the Fall, in contrast, are imperfect. Eyes appear in the head of the human being and are raised up so that they can perform their primary function of looking up to God in adoration. Angels have more acute sight (whether Milton understands this as spiritual or physical sight is not clear), but that sight can fail if it is used for the wrong purpose as it is in Satan. The attribution of perfect spiritual vision to God allows him to defy the categories of space and time: he is all seeing and can see past, present, and future as occurring in an eternal present. This temporal omniscience of God's spiritual sight is interestingly rejected by the Old English translator of Boethius

who, as Hindley explains, places God in time as one who, as a skilful pilot, has superior knowledge of events to come.

The figure of the suffering Christ affords an especially rich arena for the contemplation of the nature of the senses, for Christ was understood to experience the world more acutely through the senses than do human beings. The author of the early thirteenth-century guide to the religious life known as the *Ancrene Wisse* draws on Tertullian to assert that Christ's flesh is more alive, more sensitive to touch, than anyone else's:

Each monnes flesch is dead flesch aȝein þet wes Godes flesch. [...] For-þi in his flesch wes þe pine sarre þen eaver eani mon in his flesch þolede. Þet his flesch wes cwic over alle flesches [The flesh of all human beings is dead, compared to the state of God's flesh. [...] So in his flesh the suffering was more sharp than any other man has suffered in his, His flesh being more living than any other].<sup>6</sup>

Christ suffers in all his senses; just so the female recluse should mortify all her senses.

Furthermore, Christ's suffering provides an arena for authors in the Middle Ages to come to grips with the elusive nature of pain, a subject still deeply puzzling to contemporary philosophers and scientists. The *Ancrene Wisse* author tells us that Christ felt sensation everywhere both outside and inside his body:

Vre Lauerd i þis wit nefde nawt in a stude, ah hefde overal pine, nawt ane ȝond al his bodi, ah hefde ȝet inwiþ his seli sawle [Our Lord felt pain, not merely in one place, but everywhere; not only throughout his whole body, but also in His spotless soul].<sup>7</sup>

He endures pain everywhere in his body, but he feels it 'inwiþ' [within], ultimately in that part of the being that processes the sensory – the soul – itself an entity understood to be everywhere throughout the body as well as within it.

The senses also play a major role in the medieval contemplative's appreciation of or encounters with Christ. Recluses are told to map their own senses

6 *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Ancrene Wisse, Edited from MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien, Early English Text Society, o.s. 249 (Oxford: 1962) 61. The translation is from *Ancrene Riwe*, trans. M.D. Salu (London: Burns & Oates, 1955; reprint, Exeter: 1990) 50.

7 *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Tolkien, 60; *Ancrene Riwe*, trans. Salu, 49.

on to Christ's suffering body. Mystics describe their sensual appreciation of Christ whom they taste, smell, and touch. The Eucharistic ritual is itself characterized in terms of tasting and eating God's body. After the reformation, as Kathrin Scheuchzer tells us, religious meditation shifted focus from contemplation of God's body to meditation on God as Word. Sensual appreciation of God was not abandoned but rather a new discourse developed that celebrated eating, tasting and touching the Word of God, especially as manifest in the printed text.

Heightened sensitivity raises questions about the meaning of limitations of the senses. All human beings are restricted in their sensual understanding of the world and only God has perfect sensual understanding. The Vitellius's manuscript images of the *Wonders of the East* meditate on the status of individuals who are differently abled. Milton explores what it means to be a blind poet who eschews knowledge gained by sight for a superior understanding granted to him as spiritual insight. Spiritual insight itself can be gained through heightened experiences of one sense over another, as Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler discuss. In Chaucer's "The Second Nun's Tale", as Richard Newhauser writes in this collection and as I have discussed elsewhere, the smell of roses is transformative and brings about spiritual insight.<sup>8</sup> The possibilities granted to individuals either through acute sensitivity in one sense to the detriment of another or through the experience of disability (as in the lives of saints or accounts of miracles or even in body parts in the form of relics) are areas of research that have only just begun to be explored. Beatrix Busse and Annette Kern-Stähler have shown how a linguistic analysis of language used to discuss disabilities can reveal the early periods' surprisingly subtle understanding of disability. Contesting the assumption that in the late medieval period blindness was a monolithic condition, they show that in the late medieval period there was an awareness of various degrees of visual impairment, ranging from total blindness to partial sight.

Hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity inform discussions of the development of technologies to aid the senses, especially those inventions of the seventeenth century designed to aid the sense of sight: microscopes and telescopes. Margaret Cavendish's resistance to these inventions, as discussed in Virginia Richter's essay in this volume, though brushed aside in the march towards fully fledged empiricist practices in science, brings to light some of the ambiguities associated with such enhanced sensual skill. Cavendish expresses her scepticism

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8 Robertson E., "Apprehending the Divine and the Radical Choice to Believe in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*", *Chaucer Review: Studies in Middle English Literature in Honor of C. David Benson* 46, 1–2 (2011) 111–130.

about tools for two reasons: first, she worries that the tool impinges on the object being observed, i.e. that a butterfly in a cocoon will be killed by a microscopic analysis of it; second she is disturbed that the scientific method adopted by empirical scientists using such tools assumes that the observer's position does not shape the object being viewed. In her opinion, there is no such thing as an unbiased observation. Although Cavendish's objections were swept aside, twentieth-century developments in science have brought to the fore some aspects of her objections. It is now generally accepted that tools that are used may affect the object observed (e.g. artefacts in electron micrographs). Furthermore, the degree to which the observer's bias affects the object viewed is a matter of recent controversy. As Richter points out in her essay, a number of Cavendish's views have been taken up in contemporary feminist critiques of science. It is clear that we perceive through the senses in culturally bound and conditioned ways; therefore any study of the senses requires a careful historicist analysis of both the person perceiving and the sense object perceived.

The senses in the texts cited in these essays are most frequently described as gateways, portals, or windows. These metaphors have the danger of reinforcing a conception of sensual apprehension as a simple transfer of sense data from one domain to another (outer to inner). In the seventeenth century such images gave way to a description of the senses as channels, as Tommaso Campanella calls them, an image that better conveys the complexity of the interaction that occurs between the self and other as sense data from persons and objects outside the self come to be analyzed and understood by the faculties of the soul or the mind inside the self.<sup>9</sup> Medieval and early modern writers grappled with that dynamic interaction themselves as we can see for example in the *Ancrene Wisse's* extensive discussion of the dangers windows pose for female recluses.

The idea of simple knowledge transfer, one common in academic discourse in the United Kingdom, rests on the conduit metaphor, a pervasive but limiting metaphor of knowledge acquisition, as Michael Reddy illuminated some time ago.<sup>10</sup> But representations of the senses in the Middle Ages reveal much more complex interactions than the conduit metaphors of gates and portals might suggest. Paintings of the *Noli me Tangere* scene which represent the moment when Mary Magdalene encounters the newly Risen Christ and is forbidden to touch him because, as Christ says, 'I am not yet ascended to my Lord' (John 20:12) are particularly rich examples of the dynamic processes at work when

9 Discussed by Jütte, *A History of the Senses* 52.

10 Reddy M.J., "The Conduit Metaphor – A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language", in Ortony A. (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: 1979) 284–323.

one being encounters another completely unknown one. As I have argued elsewhere, the gap between Mary Magdalene and Christ conveys the thickness of the space between self and other and points to the complex negotiations between self and other taking place in the inbetween spaces.<sup>11</sup> The knowledge that Christ has risen is not only conveyed to Mary Magdalene but changes her being; in turn, she herself, guided by her new knowledge, gains the power to change others, though those others (the disciples) refuse to listen. In order for the new knowledge she possesses to reach them, the disciples need to interact actively with the sphere of the unknown before they too are transformed, as we see in representations of the Doubting Thomas scene. Considered the most elusive of the senses since Aristotle, touch is often the site of such phenomenological considerations even, as Farah Karim-Cooper discusses, in anti-theatrical discourse; she cites Carla Mazzio who stresses the physiological effects of words in the theatre which 'enter the bodily interior as a kind of liquid physiology, altering the substance of the heart and mind'.

That the acquisition of knowledge through the senses requires a change in the viewer is suggested by recent developments in neuroscience which argue for the neuroplasticity of the brain; scientists argue that when an animal learns something, the physical structure of the nerves and the brain actually change.<sup>12</sup> Neuroscientists such as J.D. Robertson and the Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel have shown that changes in nerve connections occur when an animal learns

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11 I discussed the interpretive richness conveyed by the gap in the paper I delivered for the conference on the senses organized by Annette Kern-Stähler and Beatrix Busse that took place in Bern in June, 2013. A longer form of that talk appears as "Noli me Tangere: The Enigma of Touch in Middle English Religious Writing", in Walter K. (ed.), *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: 2013) 29–56.

12 Recent work on the neuroplasticity of the brain is discussed in an article in the science pages of *The Observer* 8 February, 2015, "The Man Who Can Teach Us to Change Our Minds", by Tim Adams. These scientific developments are described in Norman Doidge's two popular accounts of the new science, *The Brain that Changes Itself* (New York: 2007) and *The Brain's Way of Healing* (New York: 2015). Just before his untimely death in 1995, J.D. Robertson 'began to feel that such neural plasticity was basically due to synaptic "growth" or expansion of synaptic contact areas, and he worked diligently to try to demonstrate that this expansion came about by the induction and extension of actin-rich "microspikes" within the octopus neuropil'. See John Heuser's obituary of James David Robertson in the *Newsletter of the American Society for Cell Biology*, December 1995. I have become interested in the relevance of ideas of plasticity in the study of poetry through the work of an MPhil student at Oxford, Rachel Robinson, on plasticity in the writings of the contemporary avant-garde Chilean poet, Cecilia Vicuña. Plasticity in poetics is hard to define easily but simply stated means a poetics in which the poem is both moulded by the poet and by the reader.

something; some of these structural changes are ephemeral as in short term memory; some are longer lasting. Such studies suggest that 'mental activity is not only the product of the brain but the shaper of it'.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of neuroplasticity can help us recover the dynamism of images and written representations of the senses in the past by drawing our attention to those moments in these representations that signal such transformative potential. For example, Giotto's fresco of the *Noli me Tangere* scene conveys the energy of such interactions by encasing the entire figure of Christ in a complete halo. That the viewer, Mary Magdalene, engages that energy is suggested by Giotto's representation of Mary Magdalene's hand reaching through the halo even as Christ's prohibiting hand warns her not to touch. Bringing forward the dynamic energy at the heart of these and other probing meditations on the nature of all the senses not only helps us understand the structures of the past but can teach us to be more open to their transformative potential in the present.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Adams, "The Man Who Can Teach Us to Change Our Minds" 10.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Fiona Macpherson, Desmond O'Brien and Jeffrey Robinson for conversations about this essay.



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